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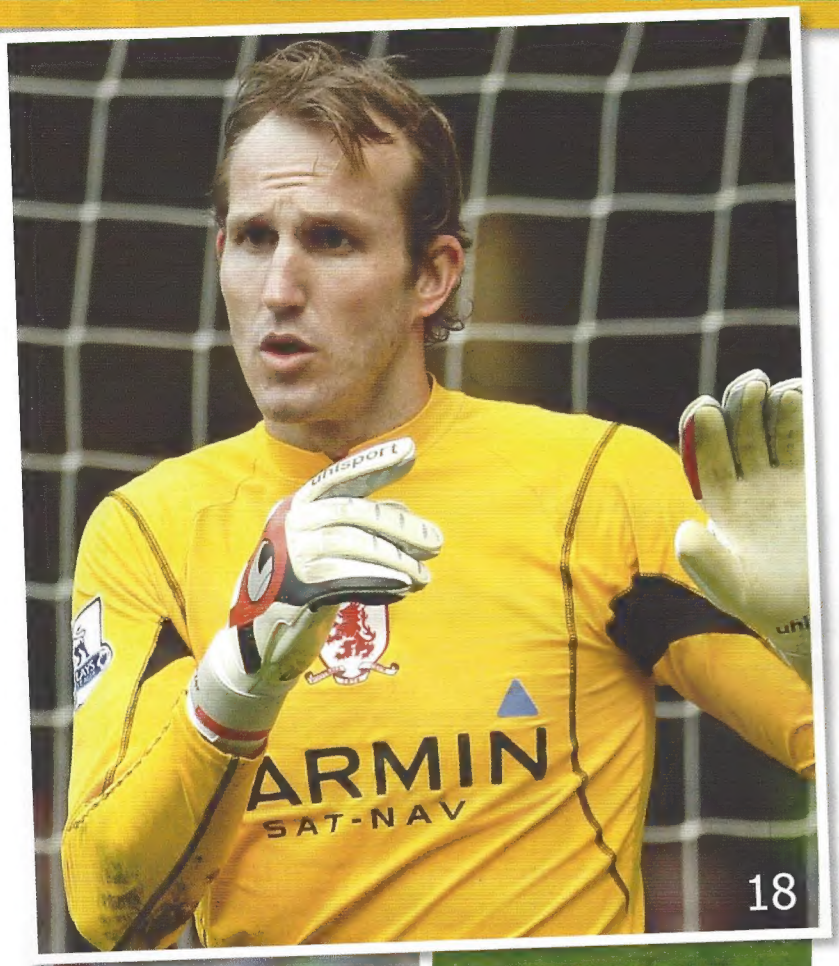

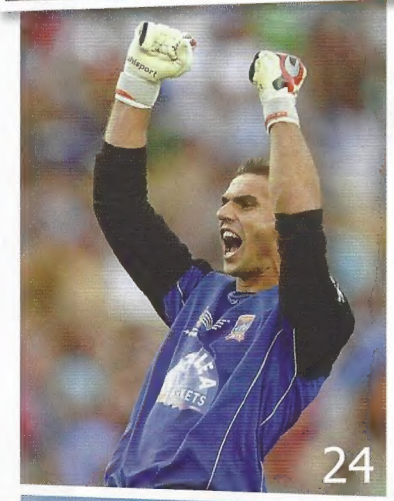

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FRANK LOWY AC

WELCOME FROM THE CHAIRMAN

"Football is our common language and a wonderful way for the nations and people of the world to expand their areas of common interest"

Welcome to this unique 'double-header' tonight at the Sydney Football Stadium.

It is not often that we have the opportunity to see the Australian women's and men's teams in action at the same event, with such high quality opponents in Canada and Ghana respectively.

The Matildas meet Canada as both teams head into major tournaments. The Matildas depart for the Asian Women's Cup on Sunday and then participate in the Peace Cup in the USA, while Canada is using this match as part of their important 2008 Olympic Games preparation.

The Qantas Socceroos play Ghana, which is 14th in the worldwide FIFA rankings, just as Australia moves into a crucial phase of our FIFA World Cup 2010 qualifying campaign with four matches over the next four weeks against Iraq (home and away), Qatar (away) and China (home).

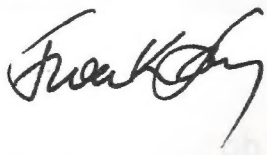
We value and appreciate the challenge of such high level competition as part of the Asian Football Confederation.

We are also honoured to welcome the President of FIFA, Joseph Blatter, and the Secretary-General of FIFA, Jerome Valcke, to the two matches tonight, as well as other special friends and guests from the worldwide football family who are in Sydney for next week's FIFA Congress.

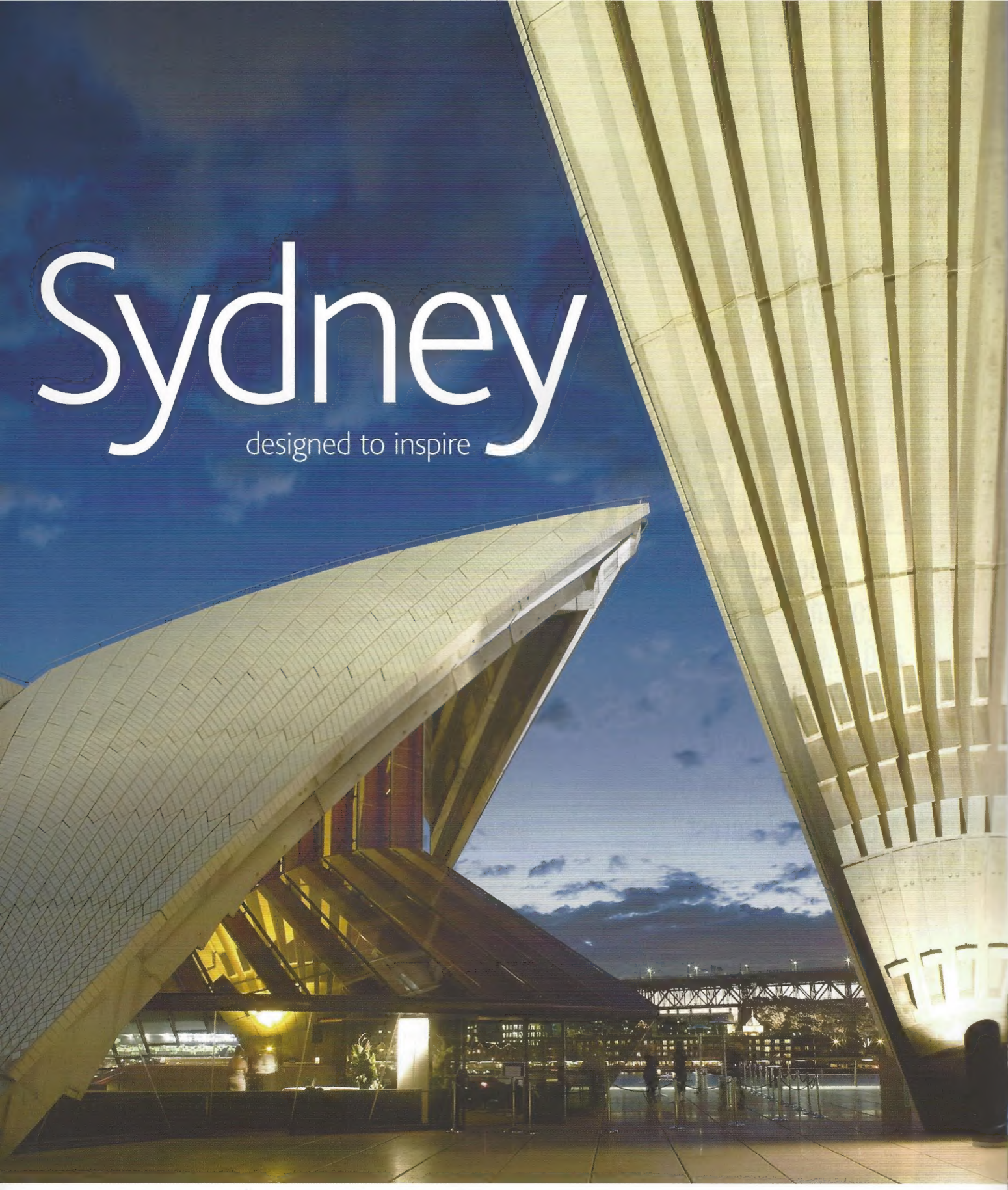
It is a rare privilege for Football Federation Australia to be able to welcome the world to Australia for this very important event in the football calendar.

We hope that our friends from the 208 member nations of FIFA not only have a successful and enjoyable Congress but also have the opportunity to experience the best of Sydney and Australia on their short visit. Football is our common language and a wonderful way for the nations and people of the world to expand their areas of common interest.

My thanks to the football associations of Canada and Ghana for being part of this occasion and, as the Matildas and the Qantas Socceroos embark upon their very important missions, my best wishes also to the teams and their staff led by Tom Sermanni and Pim Verbeek.



Frank Lowy AC
Chairman
Football Federation Australia



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MORRIS IEMMA

MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER OF NEW SOUTH WALES

"Little wonder that Ghana is currently Africa's highest ranked nation and sits 14th overall in the FIFA world rankings"

It is a pleasure to welcome the Black Stars of Ghana to Sydney – Australia's football capital – for their friendly international with the Qantas Socceroos.

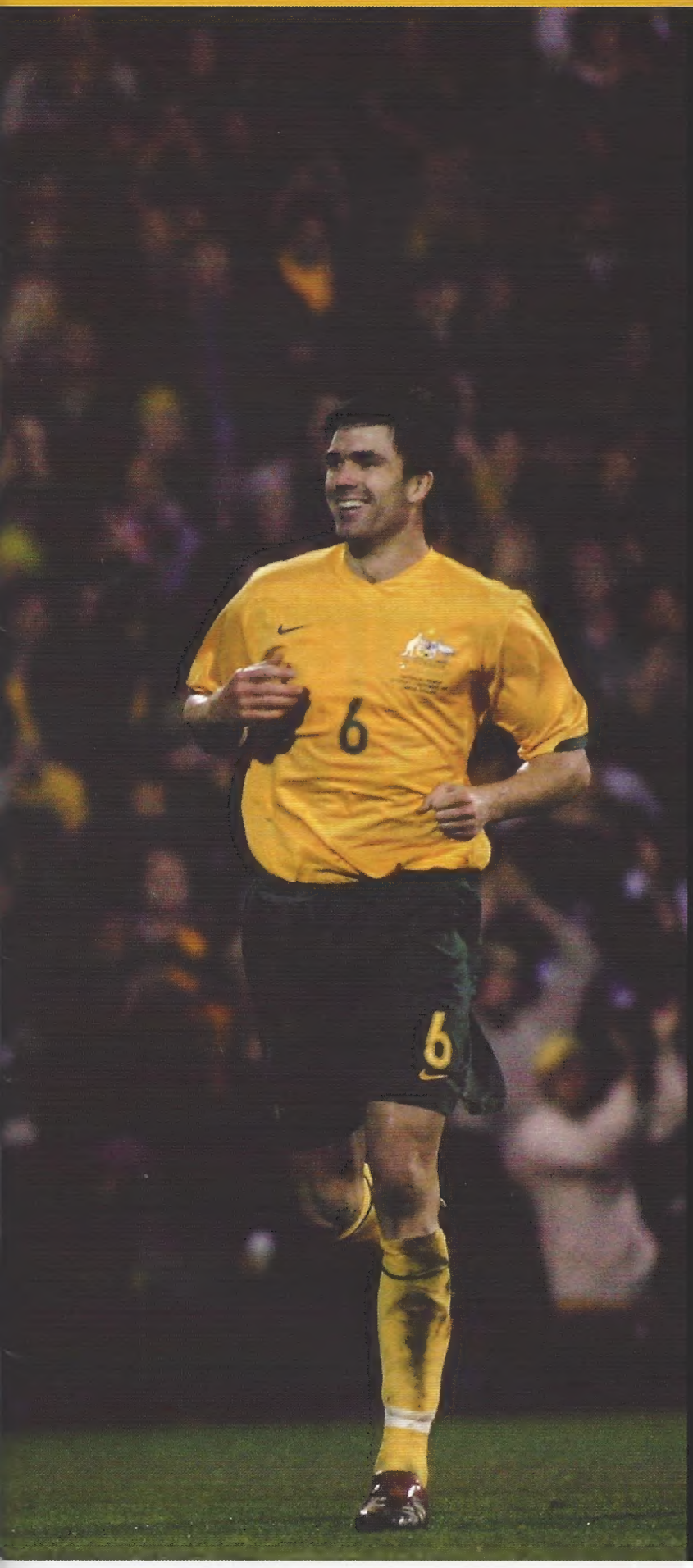
Ghana boasts an impressive football pedigree – four time winner and three time runner-up in the CAF African Cup of Nations, dual winner of the FIFA Under 17 World Cup, bronze medallist at the Barcelona 1992 Olympic Games and runner-up to Brazil in a memorable FIFA Under 20 World Cup Final at the Sydney Football Stadium in 1993.

In its first appearance in the FIFA World Cup finals in Germany 2006, Ghana – like the Qantas Socceroos – progressed to the Round of 16 with victories over the Czech Republic and the USA in its pool matches.

Little wonder that Ghana is currently Africa's highest ranked nation and sits 14th overall in the FIFA world rankings.

The Black Stars will provide an ideal preparation for the Qantas Socceroos ahead of crucial 2010 FIFA World Cup qualifiers against Iraq, Qatar and China in June as well as a fitting prelude to the prestigious FIFA Congress in Sydney from May 29-30.

Morris Iemma, MP
Premier of New South Wales



17.11.07

THE COMING OF CARNEY

Prior to this moment, David Carney was little more than a promising left-sided utility player still unproven at international level.

Despite being a former team-mate of England star Wayne Rooney in Everton's youth team, he had struggled as a teen to establish himself in England and instead became a player in Sydney FC's inaugural squad as the Hyundai A-League kicked off.

Carney impressed as one of the surprise packets in the new competition's first season, although he was more muted in an injury-plagued second campaign. At that stage, naysayers claimed he was a luxury player without the ability to make the final ball. They said he had ridden his left foot about as far as it could take him. But Carney had other ideas.

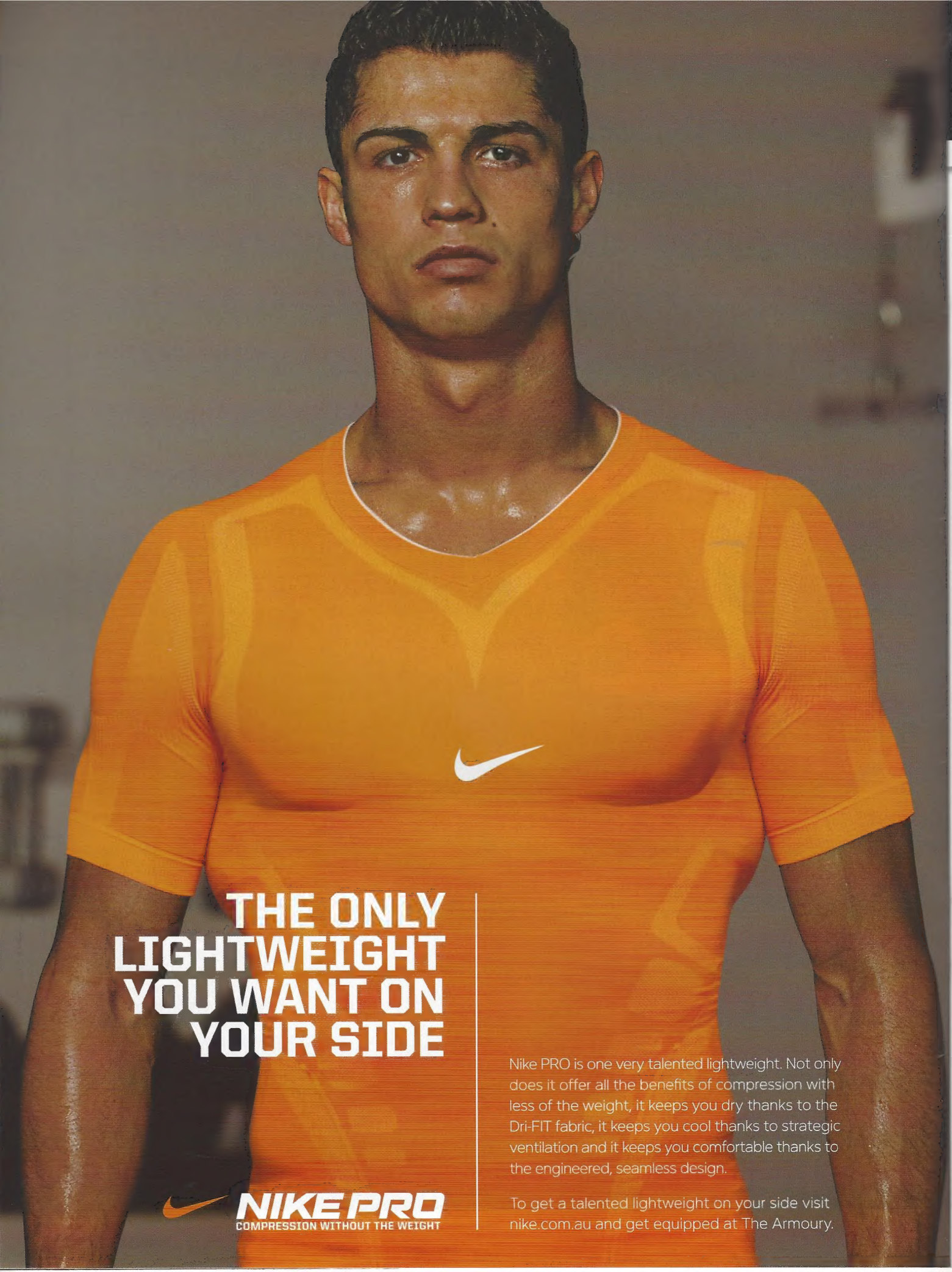
He had been part of the local-based Qantas Socceroos squads in 2006, yet it was not until last year that the blond Sydneysider began to threaten greatness. In the Green and Gold Carney was one of the few Australians who enhanced their reputations at the 2007 AFC Asian Cup and he had minimised the damage of Leo Messi in the September friendly against Argentina, man-marking with qualities of determination and desperation that some doubted he possessed.

When the friendly against Nigeria that provided this Golden Moment rolled around, Carney had been at English club Sheffield United for only a few months. There too, he had been putting in promising performances down the left flank, but nothing was to prepare Australian supporters for the magic they were about to witness.

In a match played on a dark night in pouring rain on the banks of the Thames River in London's Craven Cottage stadium, Carney was the star that illuminated the Qantas Socceroos. The first half had come and gone, and despite some positive play from the Australians, the match had yet to come alive. That changed in the 52nd minute.

Some nice interplay between Luke Wilkshire, Harry Kewell and Brett Emerton down the right flank had produced a promising cross that was only half cleared by the Nigerian defence.

Carney was waiting for the rebound in space some 30 metres out from goal. A composed touch set himself for a left-footed shot, and he duly blasted it into the net to the left of the keeper. It was a screamer of a goal, and one to remember: David Carney had arrived on the international scene.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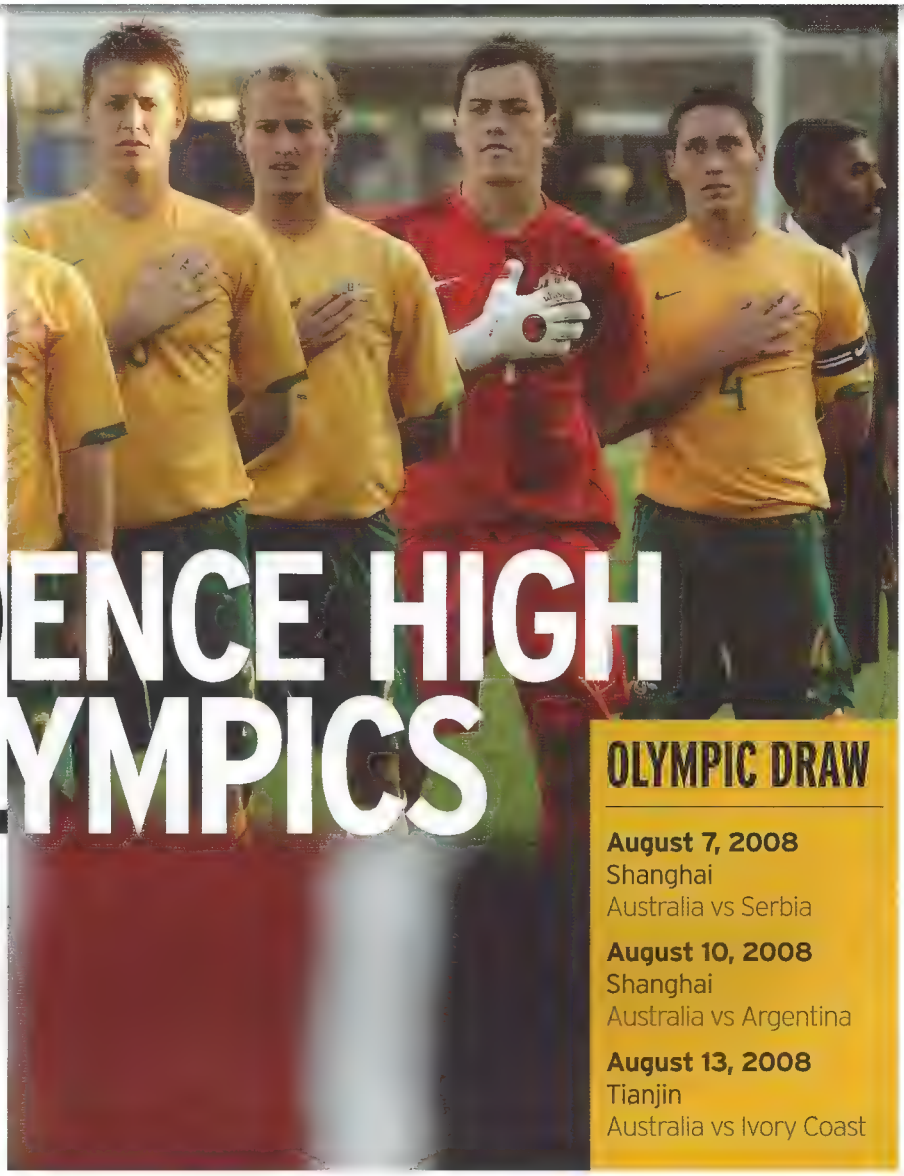

CONFIDENCE HIGH FOR OLYMPICS

Qantas Under 23s coach Graham Arnold believes that similarities between the recent draw for the 2008 Beijing Olympics football tournament and the 2004 version will work to his side's advantage.

Just like in 2004, Australia drew Argentina, Serbia and an African nation (Ivory Coast in 2008 compared with Tunisia in 2004) and Arnold is hopeful of emulating the performance of four years ago when the team made it out of the group stage.

"Last time we had a similar group and we did very well to make the quarter-finals," said Arnold, who was an assistant coach in Athens in 2004.

"We know we can get through this group, we have history and also we have had such a tough schedule just to make it this far which will hold us in good stead.

"Playing in Asia has taught us a lot about the conditions we will face in China and that could give us an advantage."

Arnold said he expects the team to play at least 12 to 13 games between now and the opening match.

"The preparations will be better than I had hoped for and we will go there to be successful.

"Also it's been a bonus to have so many of the players involved with the Qantas Socceroos," added Arnold.

Australia's opponents have been impressive in their qualifiers. Defending champions Argentina qualified after finishing runners-up to Brazil in the 2007 South American Youth Championships. Serbia made the final of Europe's 2007 UEFA Under 21 Championship and Ivory Coast topped their final qualifying group in Africa with a comprehensive five wins from six matches.

Australia is yet to win a medal at the Olympic Games having had their best finish of fourth in Barcelona in 1992, when they lost to Ghana in the bronze medal match.

OLYMPIC DRAW

August 7, 2008
Shanghai
Australia vs Serbia

August 10, 2008
Shanghai
Australia vs Argentina

August 13, 2008
Tianjin
Australia vs Ivory Coast

DID YOU KNOW?

Graham Arnold can select a squad of just 18 for the Olympic Games. This includes three over-age players and two goalkeepers, leaving just 13 places for outfield players aged 23 and under.

Test awaits Qantas Joeys

AUSTRALIA

The Qantas Joeys face a tough path to the 2009 FIFA Under 17 World Cup following the Asian qualifying draw, with Australia grouped with Saudi Arabia and China - both two-time Asian champions - and Turkmenistan.

The 16-nation AFC Under 16 Championship will be held in Uzbekistan from October 4 with the top four nations to qualify for next year's FIFA Under 17 World Cup in Nigeria.

"This would undoubtedly be the toughest group on paper but the most difficult thing is that we don't yet know the relative strengths of most of the teams," said Australian coach Martyn Crook who attended the draw in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent.

"Both Saudi Arabia and China have twice previously been crowned Asian champions and have a strong record at this level.

"Turkmenistan is a neighbouring country to the hosts and will to some degree be experienced with the conditions.

"The opening match of the campaign against Saudi Arabia will be crucial."

Australia have a strong record at youth level and were runners-up at the FIFA Under 17 World Cup in 1999.

Matildas optimistic ahead of

The Matildas have been drawn into Group B for the AFC Women's Asian Cup 2008 alongside Japan, Korea Republic and Chinese Taipei at the recent official draw ceremony.

Matildas head coach Tom Sermanni was optimistic about his team's chances following the announcement.

"I think we are placed in the more challenging of the two groups, but we have experience against each of our opponents in recent years so it won't be as daunting as our first AFC Asian Cup appearance," said Sermanni.

"Although there is no qualification for the FIFA Women's World Cup up for grabs at this tournament, it is important that we finish with a high placing to make sure we are seeded for the next round of qualifiers in 2010.

"We definitely want to build on the momentum that we had at last year's FIFA Women's World Cup and continue improving the performance of our national team on the world stage," concluded Sermanni.

The eight nation tournament will be held in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam from May 28 to June 8, 2008, with matches played at the Thong Nhat Stadium and the Army Stadium.

The Matildas were the second seeds for the tournament behind China, the reigning Asian champions.

Australia will open their AFC Women's

SATURDAY NIGHT FINAL FEVER

The FFA recently announced that the Hyundai A-League 2008/9 Season will culminate in a Saturday night Grand Final on February 28, 2009. The move to Saturday is one of several changes to the league's draw. Others include: three breaks to allow for international matches on FIFA match dates, a Boxing Day double header and a Grand Final rematch in the first round.

Asian Cup

Asian Cup 2008 campaign against Chinese Taipei on Thursday May 29, followed by the match against Korea Republic on Saturday May 31, before the final group match against Japan on Monday June 2.

The top two teams in each group will progress to the semi-finals and meet the top two teams of Group A which features China, DPR Korea, Vietnam and Thailand.

The Matildas are currently placed 12th in the FIFA rankings. DPR Korea is currently the top ranked Asian nation at 6th, with Japan ranked at 10th and China at 14th.

This will be Australia's second appearance at Asia's premier women's football competition. The Matildas were runners-up at the 2006 AFC Women's Asian Cup after losing the final on penalties to China.

AFC WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP 2008 DRAW

THURSDAY MAY 29, 2008
Australia vs Chinese Taipei

SATURDAY MAY 31, 2008
Australia vs Korea Republic

MONDAY JUNE 2, 2008
Australia vs Japan

FOOTBALL SPREADS ITS REACH

Football Federation Australia recently announced the Hyundai A-League 2008 Pre-Season Cup draw, making clear its intention to reach as many fans as possible.

Bunbury (WA), Caloundra (QLD), Cessnock (NSW), Mandurah (WA) and Mount Gambier (SA) will all host matches for the first time, while Launceston (TAS), Campbelltown (NSW), Port Macquarie (NSW) and Wollongong (NSW) will again welcome Hyundai A-League clubs for the annual pre-season tournament.

The format of the Hyundai A-League 2008 Pre-Season Cup involves two groups of four teams (Group A: Adelaide United, Melbourne Victory, Perth Glory, Newcastle Jets; Group B: Sydney FC, Queensland Roar, Wellington Phoenix, Central Coast Mariners) with each team to play the other teams in their group once.

The top teams from each group after the three rounds progress to the final on Wednesday August 6, with the winner presented the Hyundai A-League 2008 Pre-Season Cup.

Adelaide United are the defending Hyundai A-League Pre-Season Cup champions and are aiming for their third straight pre-season title. The first round of the 2008 pre-season will kick-off on Saturday July 19 with Sydney FC hosting Queensland Roar at Campbelltown Stadium in Sydney's south west and later that evening Perth Glory host the Newcastle Jets at Mandurah. The following day will see Melbourne Victory and Adelaide United meet in what is turning out to be their traditional match at Aurora Stadium in Launceston, Tasmania and the Central Coast will travel to New Zealand to face the Phoenix.

The Hyundai A-League 2008/09 season proper will commence on Friday August 15, 2008.

FFA and Hyundai continue partnership

Football Federation Australia and Hyundai Motor Company Australia recently announced that the car manufacturer's successful naming rights partnership of the Hyundai A-League will continue for an additional four years to the end of the 2011/2012 season.

"We are delighted to announce that our partnership with our very good friends at Hyundai has been extended for an additional four seasons," said FFA chief executive Ben Buckley.

"Hyundai was the first major partner to take the leap of faith and invest in the A-League before anyone knew what to expect from the new competition.

"Their faith and support has seen the partnership develop a sporting product that has captured the attention of fans not just in Australia, but around the world.

"The Hyundai A-League is now an established part of the Australian sporting landscape and we have Steve Yeo and his team at the Hyundai Motor Company Australia to thank for this success," concluded Buckley.

Hyundai Motor Company Australia CEO Steve Yeo was equally proud to announce an extension of the partnership.

"Our team at Hyundai Motor Company Australia and our national dealer network look forward to building an even stronger working partnership with the FFA and the broader Australian football community.

"As the founding sponsor of the Hyundai A-League, our partnership with football in Australia has witnessed many changes including an increase in registrations, TV audience viewing numbers as well as crowd attendance at Hyundai A-League matches. Together we look forward to continue our important role in the further development of football in Australia.

"Globally, Hyundai is mid-way through a 14-year partnership with FIFA and our position as founding naming rights partner of the Hyundai A-League is an important part of this worldwide football support network by the Hyundai brand, " concluded Yeo.

Hyundai was the first partner of the competition, which was announced on November 1, 2004, with a four year agreement as the naming rights partner.

Hyundai's partnership with football in Australia extends across the sport from the "Goals for Grassroots" community program through to the support of the Qantas Socceroos and Matildas.

The recent partnership announcement also coincided with the official release of the Hyundai A-League 2008/09 season draw, which kicks off on Friday August 15, and concludes with the first Saturday night Hyundai A-League Grand Final in the history of the competition.

TOGETHER WE'LL LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD

No matter how little a child has, if they have their health, they have a shot at a future. Which is why UNICEF Australia and Football Federation Australia are teaming up to create crucial sports-based community programs for underprivileged children whose lives are at risk from poverty, disease and violence in places such as Papua New Guinea, Iraq and even parts of Australia. And now we're asking you to join the team.

Please donate whatever you can at www.unicef.org.au

unicef | FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

YOUNG MATILDAS TOPPLE KIWIS

The under-20 national women's team, the Young Matildas, completed their April training camp in Canberra with a 4-2 win over the New Zealand under-17 team.

After conceding a goal in the second minute, the Australians went into halftime with a 3-1 lead thanks to two goals from Kyah Simon [*right*] and a long-range strike by Teresa Polias.

Substitute Nicola Bolger came on in the 68th minute and three minutes later she slotted home the fourth for the home side.

New Zealand then struck a late goal to leave the match at 4-2.

The squad, coached by Alen Stajcic, is in the early stages of preparation for their 2010 Women's World Youth Cup campaign while the Kiwis will host the FIFA U17 Women's World Cup later this year.

Match Details
Australia U20
4 (Kyah Simon 2, Teresa Polias, Nicola Bolger)
New Zealand U17 2

Australian line-up: 18 Casey Dumont (GK), 2 Teresa Polias, 5 Jessica Seaman, 7 Emily van Egmond (6 Nicola Bolger 68'), 8 Elise Kellond-Knight (15 Bronwyn Studman 74'), 9 Monnique Kofoed (4 Karina Roweth 58'), 10 Kyah Simon (19 Jenna Kingsley 79'), 11 Ella Mastrantonio, 12 Ruth Blackburn, 13 Tameka Butt (16 Danielle Calautti 84'), 20 Samantha Spackman
Subs not used: 17 Vedrana Popovic

AUSSIE FOOTBALL TEAMS UP WITH UNICEF

Football Federation Australia and UNICEF Australia have announced their new partnership to benefit vulnerable children in Australia and Asia.

UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, is the leading, effective global organisation working on development and emergency relief around the world. Achieving results for over 60 years, UNICEF helps children to survive and thrive by providing communities with essential medicines, vaccines, educational, and emergency supplies.

The FFA joins a prestigious group of global football bodies, clubs and players partnering with UNICEF.

The partnership follows in the footsteps of FIFA's support for UNICEF through the FIFA World Cup and FIFA Women's World Cup, UNICEF's partnerships with Barcelona FC, Manchester United and Real Madrid, and support by UNICEF Ambassadors such as David Beckham and Harry Kewell.

Ben Buckley, chief executive of the FFA, said all the staff and players are thrilled to partner with UNICEF.

"Football has the power to unite children all over the world. Football in Australia is going through a growth period and what better way to take advantage of this than to join the global football community in its partnership with UNICEF to help millions of vulnerable children."

Initially, the FFA partnership will support UNICEF community development programs for children in Papua New Guinea, Iraq and Indigenous communities within Australia.

"Sport and play are important to UNICEF because they are vital elements in the health, happiness and well-being of children and young people," said UNICEF chief executive Carolyn Hardy.

"UNICEF achieves results and together with the FFA, we will use sport-based programs to deliver important messages about child health and well-being, improve children's lives and strengthen communities. Outreach to FFA supporters in Australia will provide vital funds for these programs," she said.

The partnership for children is being promoted extensively at the upcoming FIFA World Cup qualifiers in Australia and overseas through matchday announcements, advertisements featuring Qantas Socceroo ambassadors, and promotion to FFA supporters.

Youngsters ready to fire

The Qantas Young Socceroos have drawn Jordan, Thailand and Uzbekistan in Group D of the AFC Under 19 Asian Championship to be held in Saudi Arabia later this year.

The top two teams in the group will progress to the quarter-finals and meet those teams who progress from Group C which contains DPR Korea, China, Tajikistan and Lebanon. Groups A and B contain the likes of South Korea, Iraq, Japan, Iran and host-nation Saudi Arabia.

The four semi-finalists of the AFC Under 19 Asian Championship will represent Asia at the FIFA Under 20 World Cup in Egypt next year.

The Qantas Young Socceroos commenced their road to the FIFA U20 World Cup after progressing past the first stage of qualification last November.

A number of Hyundai A-League players have already featured in the campaign to date including recently capped Qantas Socceroo James Holland and Newcastle Jets team-mate Jason Hoffman, Queensland Roar attacking pair Tahj Minniecon and Mitch Nichols, Central Coast Mariners goalkeeper Andrew Redmayne plus Melbourne Victory duo Sebastian Ryall and Nathan Elasi.

Australian's three Group D matches will be played at the Prince Saudi Bin Jalawi Stadium in Al Khobar, Saudi Arabia, from November 1, 2008.

AFC U19 ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP DRAW:

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 1
Australia vs Thailand

MONDAY NOVEMBER 3
Australia vs Uzbekistan

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 5
Australia vs Jordan

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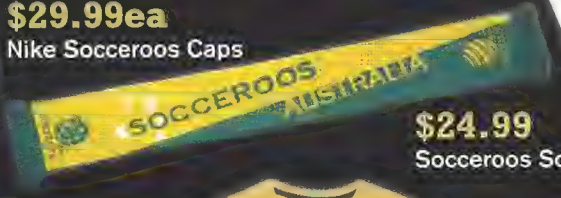

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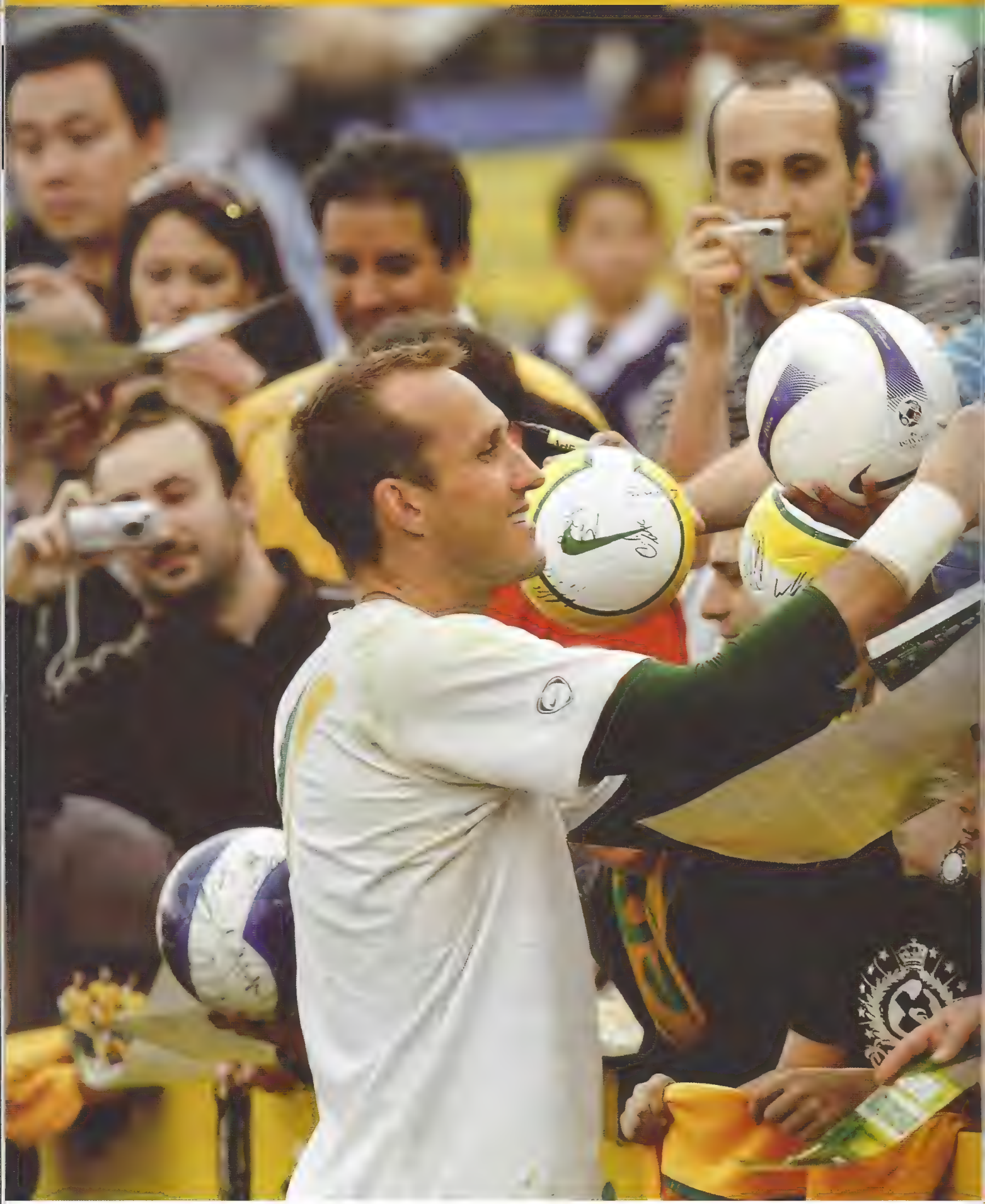


ON THE MARK

Aussie goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer offers his take on the upcoming qualifiers, and what has been a difficult season at his club

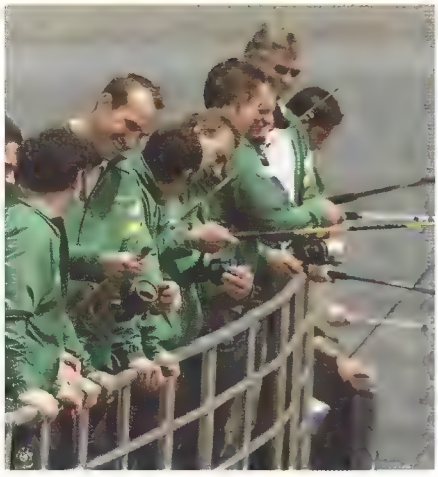
VITAL STATISTICS
Born October 6, 1972, Sydney NSW
Height 196cm
Weight 92kg
Debut vs Canada (L1-2), Edmonton, July 1993
International appearances 54

Where did you grow up and do you ever get back there?
Out Richmond way [in Western Sydney], North Richmond. I went out there last June, but other than that, not really. See none of my family really live there any more and none of my close mates live there so I never really have a reason to go out there.

Has it changed much?
It's just about development really. It's just about bigger shops and more houses and so forth, but in general it's all the same area. A lot of the same people are there that you grew up with, they're just older.

How does it feel when you're in Australia in the off-season?
When I'm at home, it's sort of a different feeling anyway to being in Europe and playing and working. When I go back home and play in Australia, it's different. You're in a different environment, there's a totally different vibe about it all. It's more enjoyable, it's a change of scenery. If I'm working or not doing anything, it's nice to have two or three weeks where I'm doing nothing but these days that doesn't happen very often, so I just have to get on with it. You might have a couple of days here and there, but normally there's always something else on.

Do you plan to move back at the end of your career?
Yeah. My wife's from Sydney as well, and



all my family lives in Australia. Mum and Dad live in Coffs Harbour and the rest of my family live out Nepean/Penrith way.

What are the first three things you'll do in retirement in Australia?
Go to the beach. Go and have a coffee because I'm a coffee addict. I love the café scene. And what else would I do? Probably go fishing!

You played against Ghana's Sulley Ali Muntari recently for Middlesbrough. How do you rate him?
Yep, he's a good player. He played well against us and caused us a lot of trouble. Ghana are a good side. They've done well at the FIFA World Cup. They've got some great players, world-class players at various clubs around Europe, so they're going to be a tough opponent. They're the typical African team. They're very athletic, they're very fit, and it's going to be a good contest for us.

Do you remember much of the 2006 friendly against them?
Yeah I do. Obviously we let in a very soft goal where I caught it and then bumped into Patty Kisnorbo and dropped it for a tap-in, so yeah I do remember that one unfortunately! They're a good side, but I think this time round we're in a different phase now. We're in a different place now as a team. We're a lot more organised. I think it's going to be a lot more difficult a task for them to come to Australia and play. I think we're quietly confident that we can do a very good job against them.

Having been in the AFC for a couple of years now, Australia's knowledge of Asian opponents is growing. What have you noticed about the technical differences between countries?
I think that you're definitely right, there are different technicalities about the various players from different regions.

This match against Japan last year ended in a rare shoot-out defeat for Mark

Some are more prone to do certain things than maybe other ones would be. In Asia, the Arab players tend to be more theatrical than the guys from China or Korea or Thailand. So there's a different way of approaching matches when we're playing different opposition. But in general there's also that certain unknown quality about them. They're not as well known around the world, you don't see them as often, because they're not playing in the most prominent leagues in the world.

But the more you play against them, the more you get to recognise players and the more you get to experience what those certain players can do and the different types of techniques. So the more experience we have against them, the better we'll be in future. At the moment, we've had that little bit of experience along the way, whether it's been the AFC Asian Cup or whether it's been the qualifiers so far. I think what you tend to do is group them more into regions rather than individual teams at the moment, because each region has their own unique way of playing games like I said before.

Of the qualifiers in June, which will provide the biggest challenge?
I think all the games are going to be a big challenge. We're going to have Iraq at home. They're obviously under a lot of pressure after only drawing their

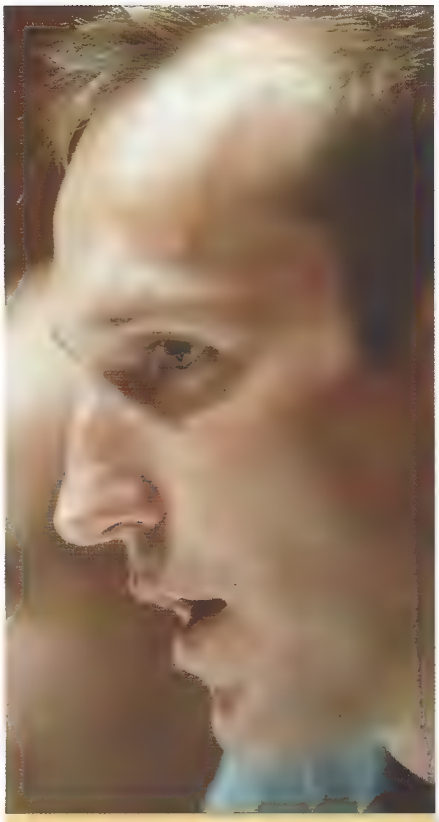
first game and losing their second game. They're going to come to Australia with nothing to lose and all to gain. Obviously we're in a different situation having won one and drawn one and you know we are under a lot of pressure to perform against Iraq and win the game. They're going to be a tough opponent, as will be China, as will be Qatar.

When we were playing Qatar in Melbourne we dominated the game so much in the first half, if we were leading 6-0 I think that would have been justifiable the way we were performing. But if you look at the return leg, playing in Qatar, you look at the game we're going to have to play in Dubai, the conditions are going to have a major effect on the games because it's going to be extremely hot, it's going to be extremely humid, and these guys – the Iraqi and Qatar teams – are so used to those conditions.

And China, they're a very good side and are challenging. We don't know what position we're going to be on the table when we play them: whether we need to still win a game, whether China still need to win a game. By then both teams could have already qualified or one or the other could have already missed out.

How are you expecting the team to benefit from tonight's match and the preparations beforehand?

It gives Pim the opportunity to work with



MISSING THE BUS

Schwarzer turns 36 in October, making him the oldest player in the Qantas Socceroos squad. He has publicly stated his intention to be at the 2010 FIFA World Cup and has not ruled out playing on after that.

"I don't wake up thinking 'gosh, I feel old', or I don't finish training and think 'I feel like I've been hit by a bus'," says Schwarzer.

"I think that I train probably harder than the younger guys. I think a lot of the time the younger guys just relax and rest on their laurels, and rest a lot on their physicality of being young and being able to handle it. But I still feel a lot of the time that I'm fitter than a lot of young goalkeepers especially."

Schwarzer's continual improvement over the years and his thirst for work on the training ground are key ingredients for an extended playing career. Maybe the 2014 FIFA World Cup – when Schwarzer will be 41 – is not that far off after all.

the majority of his squad a bit longer than he's had in the past. I think I've trained under Pim for about three days so far in the two qualifiers in total. We're going to be able to work as a team in areas we need to improve on, and things we need to be more disciplined at, and he'll be able to pass on more of his own beliefs and thoughts about the way he wants to play to the team as a whole. He's only had the Australian-based players and maybe a few overseas-based players in camp before this, and the other games have been qualifiers where you can't take too many gambles.

Middlesbrough is known as one of the best clubs in England for youth development. How do the young Aussie players compare with those English youngsters at the club?
I don't think there's too big a difference. Maybe the biggest difference at the moment – and it has been probably for the last 10 years or so – is the level which these guys in England get to perform at on a regular basis.

The Hyundai A-League is improving year after year, and it's only going to get better. The important thing is having the level of play. The higher the quality of play, the more the younger players know that that's where the bar stands, and you need to achieve that level of consistency and that level of performance before you get a look in. The longer the Hyundai A-League goes on, the more the quality improves, and the better it will be for Australian football as a whole.

The biggest difference in the UK is that the level is very high already, and the younger players that are getting the opportunity are coming in at a very high level, and need to perform at a very high level very quickly and will either sink or swim. But generally you put the two next to each other on the football pitch and the guys from Australia can definitely hold their own. Whether they can hold their own over the course of 38 games in a Premier League season would be something else.

Is there much difference between English and Aussie boys' mentality?
Not really, I think the biggest difference with the Aussie boys is that they all know if they want to play at the very highest level, if they want to make that step up into Europe, they need to travel ten and a half thousand miles and the English boys don't. A lot of the English boys can stay and live with their parents. The Aussie guys have to be more mature earlier, otherwise they don't get the opportunity to move on, or they won't last. The guys that leave Australia at a young age definitely grow up a lot quicker.

Can you pick out a personal highlight from your season at Middlesbrough?
It's been a difficult season for everyone at the club. We turned things around as a team really well just around Christmas time, after we got knocked out of the FA Cup against Cardiff. From that point onwards, the season did turn around for us, we performed very well as a team. Maybe we didn't win as many games as we probably should have, but we had some tremendous performances: away to Aston Villa, away to Arsenal, Chelsea, Tottenham, and Manchester United at home. We've had some tremendous performances but also some bad ones in between which has always been an issue with a club like ours. For me to pick out any performance individually, it's difficult to say, I don't really look at it that way.

"[Against China] to actually make a save and keep the ball out and then go on and keep a clean sheet was nice. I thought it was justice"

I leave it to other people to make that sort of judgment. As long as I think of myself as having played well enough and done my job, that's all that matters, and obviously that the manager's happy.

How has this season compared to your previous ones?
I'd like to think that it's been pretty consistent. I'd like to think that I've contributed as much to the performance

JONES' TOWN

Alongside Mark Schwarzer at Middlesbrough is fellow Australian keeper Brad Jones. After making his Qantas Socceroos debut in June last year, Jones has endured a disappointing season, after groin and finger injuries restricted his opportunities.

"This season has been very, very difficult for him," Schwarzer says. "He's been very disappointed – I know,

and as much to us getting over the bad performances early on to be part of the team that helped get us up the table and get us to safety. The way we've performed as a team... the league position has been probably most disappointing for a number of years now, and probably most frustrating.

Finally, what was going through your head before and during the penalty against China a few months ago?
Well firstly, it was probably one of the only balls that was knocked over the top that held up. All the rest sort of kept going so I was surprised that the ball held up as much as it did. I thought that the first collision I had with their player was fair and nothing was wrong with it, because of the way the ball's played and the way it held up.

The second one.... when the penalty was given I thought it was very harsh. I think it showed on TV, and from what I've been told, that I got the ball and flicked the ball to the side, but the referee's given a penalty. The referee has to make a split-second decision, he can only see it how he sees it. I don't think I would have done anything differently.

Once it's been given, there's a lot racing through your mind. You're thinking, "Gosh, the game's going to be finished shortly and I've just given a penalty away." Then all of a sudden you slip into thinking, "Right, it's been given, now, what can I do? The only thing I can do is hopefully save it." Being in that situation standing there with two or three minutes to play, thinking this is your last opportunity to do anything, to actually make a save and keep the ball out and then go on and keep a clean sheet, and almost go on and win the game in the end, was nice. I thought it was justice – from my point of view anyway!

Keeping Thailand at bay in the AFC Asian Cup

Schwarzer in action for Middlesbrough

we've spoken about it. He's looking to write this season off and get on with next season so he can start afresh and hopefully stay injury free."

Having spent close to a decade at Middlesbrough, Jones is still to hit the big-time, and remains something of an enigma for Australian football fans. Schwarzer is happy to shed some light on his team-mate:

"He's definitely got that Aussie laid-back attitude. Everything is 'she'll be right mate'. But he's got the makings of being a very good goalkeeper."

AFTER SCHWARZER

WHO WILL BE THE NEXT #1?

These emerging keepers are making Australia's top goalkeeper spot one to watch over the coming years

By Jack Snape

The men most likely: Ante Covic, Michael Petkovic, Clint Bolton, Adam Federici, Danny Vukovic, Brad Jones, Nathan Coe, Jess Vanstrattan, Tando Velaphi, Andrew Redmayne, Mitchell Langerak and Dean Bouzanis

Mark Schwarzer has had a long and distinguished history in the Qantas Socceroos. From his heroic starting debut in 1993 against Canada, to his appearance at the FIFA World Cup in 2006 and as recently as March when he earned Australia a point in China with another penalty save, the Sydney-born keeper has enjoyed a sensational time in green and gold.

Schwarzer is set to be around at least until 2010, however the next generation of Australian goalkeepers is beginning to emerge. Some of these men were too young to open a savings account in 1993 when Schwarzer was first saving an international penalty. Now they are the next in line in Australia's glorious history of world class number ones.

Keeper era

Beyond Schwarzer, Australia's elite goalkeeping talent can loosely be broken down into three age groups. The oldest, those above 30 such as Ante Covic, Michael Petkovic and Clint Bolton are proven performers domestically or in a second tier league in Europe. These men have proved they can perform in internationals when called upon, but their age makes them long shots for the 2014 FIFA World Cup. Covic will be 39 for the Brazil finals tournament, Bolton 38 and Petkovic 37. Were form or injury to create doubt around Schwarzer in the short term however, these are the men most likely to replace him.

The second group consists of those keepers in their early to mid-twenties. Reading's Adam Federici, Central Coast Mariners' Danny Vukovic, Brad Jones at Middlesbrough, Nathan Coe from FC Copenhagen and Juventus's Jess Vanstrattan are all between 22 and 26 and have made impressive early steps in their careers.

The final generation is those aged 21 and under. The likes of Tando Velaphi at Perth Glory, the Mariners' Andrew Redmayne, Melbourne Victory's Mitchell Langerak and Dean Bouzanis from Liverpool are all keepers with immense potential. However, they have some way to go before establishing themselves in the first team at their clubs, let alone breaking through at international level. That is not to say none will make the necessary steps in the next couple of years, but these men will be looking more to the FIFA World Cup in 2018 than those tournaments before then.

Peak easy

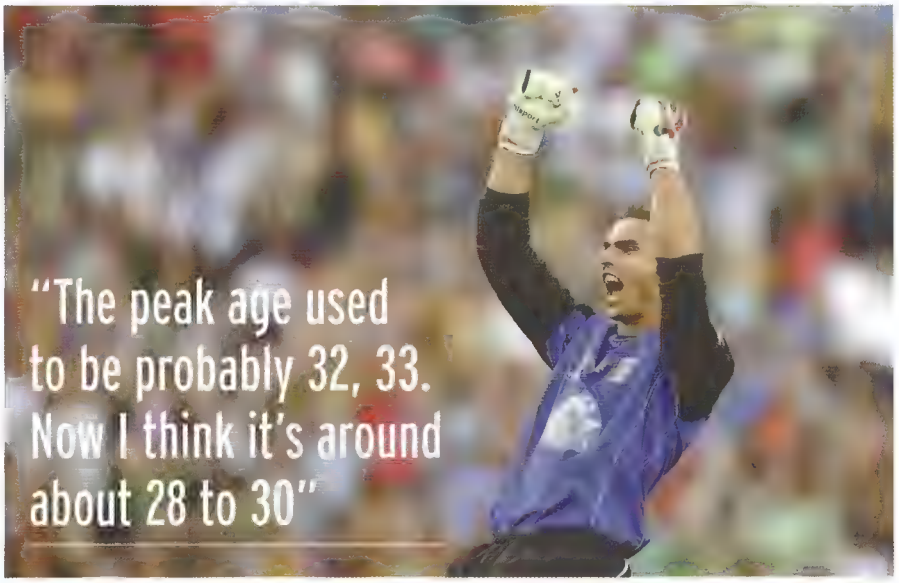
The traditional peak age for a goalkeeper used to be in their early 30s. While keepers may maintain their elite level of performance for up to a decade after they hit their peak, younger keepers are

considered apprentices, still learning the nuances of their trade. But Sydney FC goalkeeper coach and former Australian keeper Jim Fraser believes a professional keeper's peak age may be dropping.

"I think it takes a long time to learn the game, to be tactically aware, but keepers are getting more games now than they used to and they're more involved in the game," he says. "The peak age used to be probably 32, 33. Now I think it's around about 28 to 30 when they can really be at their top."

If we look ahead six years to the 2014 FIFA World Cup, then our middle generation of keepers – the likes of Vukovic and Federici – will have just entered their peak.

Technically superb: Nathan Coe



Match point

With some concern then, national goalkeeping coach and former Australian international keeper Tony Franken acknowledges that within that vital second group there currently exists a startling lack of first-team experience.

"They're not playing a lot of first team football," he admits. "You can train as much as you like, but playing in games with decision making – when and when not to come off the line, when to come for crosses and so forth – the more games you play the more confident the goalkeeper becomes, then the easier it is to step up.

"I'm hoping that in the next year or so one of these guys steps forward and puts real pressure on Schwarzer in playing every week in a top division and puts their claims forward for national duty."

For many of these younger keepers, the Holy Grail of first team football may simply not be an option at their current club. In front of them may be more established, more experienced keepers, who enjoy the preference of their coaches. The path to the first-team can be long and winding; a move to another club may be required.

"I did it 10 years ago when I first came to England," says Mark Schwarzer. "I was never afraid to do that. Some of these guys need to look at themselves and think 'well, you know, I've got to be bigger than that', and not worry about what other people are saying about you taking a step down and going to a smaller club."

Dropping down to a division that still offers a satisfactory quality of football may be possible for some of these keepers. In England for example, the Championship – the old second division – provides just enough of a challenge for a goalkeeper to make it a worthwhile step in their development. But an Australian keeper with genuine international aspirations should not be in Europe beyond the top two tiers in England, Spain and Italy, or the top divisions in a handful of other countries.

For the others, the best pathway for their development is within the Hyundai A-League. Franken is clear about the role of Australia's domestic league in the development of the country's keepers.

"I'd like to use the Hyundai A-League as a base for these goalkeepers to be proven good custodians at Hyundai A-League level and then at 22 or 23 or 24, make the move overseas," he states.

Yet Fraser believes Australia's local league still needs to improve to give keepers the best possible environment for improvement.

"The problem we've got in the Hyundai A-League at the moment is that if a goalkeeper gets established he's not going to get turned over. Vukovic was under no pressure at Central Coast, Covic isn't under pressure at Newcastle, Bolton's under no pressure at the moment [at Sydney]. These blokes have got to be in a situation where they're under pressure to keep their job so they perform better."

Balancing these conflicting points of view however may be challenging. While a starting job in Serie A or La Liga would

be ideal, for our young Aussie keepers this just isn't an option. If you were an aspiring keeper aged 24 then, which option do you think gets you closer to an international berth: a Hyundai A-League contract, a starter's job in a European backwater or being third choice at a Premiership Club? It is fair to say the Vukovic generation has yet to solve this conundrum. The first to do so will get a step on his rivals and will place himself in pole position to become Schwarzer's replacement.

Danny Vukovic, as the only one of this group to have secured recent first-team football, will prove to be an important test case in the short term. Having already proven himself as a Hyundai A-League success, all eyes will be on him and where he makes his next move.

Pack passing

Whoever replaces him, Schwarzer's retirement will also signal the end of an era. Schwarzer grew up in the days before the backpass rule was introduced, when goalkeepers could pick up any ball that came their way.

His replacement will be of a new breed. Post-backpass, the skill requirements for a keeper are far more demanding, particularly on footwork. Keepers are now involved in passing and possession exercises in training, and are expected to be capable athletes.

"These days the all-round goalkeepers, you look at Petr Cech, you look at [Gianluigi] Buffon, the big names in goalkeepers, they've got a good all-round game," says Schwarzer. "They can play well with their feet, they can dominate their area and of course they're great shot stoppers."

While Schwarzer has adapted his game over his career to meet the contemporary keeper requirements, Australia's younger keepers have grown up guided by the modern prototype. All have sound kicking and control, and can be confident when a backpass comes their way. On paper, they meet today's demands for football's custodians.

"They're not goalkeepers now, they're goal players," reckons Fraser. "They've

THE LOST GENERATION

So where are all the Aussie keepers in their late 20s/early 30s? In 1999 and 2000, the Qantas Under 23s used four goalkeepers. Danny Milosevic [*left*] had spells at Leeds and Celtic but returned to play one season for New Zealand Knights in the Hyundai A-League. Peter Zois had some success as a backup at Willem II in Holland, but has since returned to the Victorian state league with Altona Magic. Michael Turnbull was another who had a stint at the Knights, and is another currently in a state league, with Sydney United. The last man? Who else but Joey Didulica, he who chose Croatia over Australia and is now playing at AZ in Holland.

got to have all the skills of a field player, all the tactical knowledge of a field player, they should have the best first touch in the team they've got to have everything a field player's got plus their own unique skills."

One player whose footwork stands out is Adam Federici. The Reading keeper has even scored a goal playing as an emergency outfield player in a club friendly two years ago. It's a quality that is not lost on Franken.

"I saw him in June last year, he came for the Uruguay game. In the possession drills he was as good as any of the players. He's probably the most impressive I've seen with the use of his feet in those small-sided games and those possession skills."

High tide

The professionalism of the modern game has also meant that strength, fitness and height are all of utmost importance. The difference every week between a victory and a defeat may be millimetres. In addition to an outstanding and varied skillset then, Franken acknowledges that modern goalies need to have almost superhuman reach and height.

"The type, the physique of a goalkeeper in the modern day is tall and slender and there's not many small and stocky goalkeepers playing, especially in some of the European leagues."

This area is perhaps where there remains a question mark over Australia's younger keepers. Schwarzer stands at an imposing 196cm. The only keepers to be within 5cm of Schwarzer are Ante Covic at 193cm and Andrew Redmayne at 194cm. Covic is less than three years younger than Schwarzer, and of those mentioned above, Redmayne is perhaps furthest from first team football.

While most others are around the 190cm mark for a keeper, it appears that it is unlikely that Australia's goalkeepers in the future will enjoy the height advantage in recent times offered by Schwarzer and the 202cm Zeljko Kalac.

Danny Vukovic is of similar stature to Shay Given at English club Newcastle, standing only marginally over six foot. Given is a fine keeper, yet he is also the shortest keeper in the Premier League.

"Generally the next generation are not necessarily man mountains but they are very capable keepers," says Franken. "Whether when they start playing at a higher level regularly, whether that physicality will be a problem, I'm not sure. I don't think so but yes we haven't got a Kalac or a Schwarzer in terms of height coming through."

Sydney's Clint Bolton remains an elite keeper

"Goalkeepers have got to have everything a field player's got plus their own unique skills"

While admitting that Vukovic's height may be slightly less than what is desirable, Fraser contests the proposition that taller is necessarily better.

"It's no good being six foot seven [201cm] if you don't come off your line. A lot of keepers are six foot seven and jump five foot three. If you mention a goalkeeper to coaches the first thing they'll say is not 'how good' but 'how tall'. There is this psychological thing with coaches that they want keepers of a certain height. I think the ideal height is about 6' 2" [188cm] or 6' 3" [191cm]."

Fortunately, 10 of the 12 men pictured on page 24 measure up to Fraser's ideal height. That, together with excellent specialist coaching and an improving development pathway, mean our next generation keepers have every opportunity to live up to the proud history of Australia's number one jersey. With names like Schwarzer, Bosnich and Fraser etched into Australian football folklore, the pressure is on for one of these youngsters to step up.

Never before has the field been more open. Who will steal the initiative and step into the breach? Who will be our next penalty king?

GHANA

Gleaming Ghana

Tonight the Black Stars begin their preparations for a run to South Africa with a friendly clash with old rivals Australia

By Aidan Ormond

Up until 1957, Ghana used to be known as the Gold Coast. It's true. Aside from sharing a name with that much-loved Aussie icon of surf and sun, there are a few other similarities with Australia and our football culture.

Take the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany. For debutants Ghana and the Qantas Socceroos - though we had been to the big show once before - it was a miraculous, exhilarating success.

Both sides shocked bigger opponents in the group stage and both faced world superpowers in the knock-out round. And together they exited football's biggest party with reputations on the world stage deservedly enhanced.

Just like the Vidukas, Schwarzers and Cahills of the current Australian side, this golden generation of Ghanaian talent

Ghana celebrate a goal in their last clash with Australia

VITAL STATISTICS

Full name Ghana Football Association (GFA)

Nickname The Black Stars

Most caps Abedi Pele (73)

Top scorer Abedi Pele (33)

Home stadium Ohene Djan stadium, Accra

FIFA ranking 14 (as of April 2008)

Highest ranking 14 (currently)

Lowest ranking 89 (in June 2004)

GHANA

Sulley Ali Muntari in action in the African Cup of Nations earlier this year

Ghana, as one of the world leaders in youth football and the producer of some of Africa's finest ever players, has a magnificent history

that finally got the Black Stars to their first FIFA World Cup – the likes of Michael Essien, Sulley Muntari, Stephen Appiah and Asamoah Gyan – plays club football on some of Europe's biggest stages.

Ghana and Australia have also got to know each other closely, having played regularly over the last decade or so.

Yet Ghana, as one of the world leaders in youth football and the producer of some of Africa's finest ever players, has a magnificent history of its own.

Young guns

The Ghana story must begin with their greatest achievement: their performance at the last FIFA World Cup.

On their way to Germany, Ghana had topped their qualification group with 21 points from their 10 matches, five points ahead of Congo DR and South Africa.

However, expectations weren't high going into Germany following a first round exit at the African Cup of Nations just five months prior to the FIFA 2006 World Cup finals.

The losses of Essien, Muntari and exciting striker Gyan [*see right*] were the main reasons put forward for their disappointing exit from Africa's elite tournament. But this served to lessen the pressure on the side, which may have been a blessing in disguise.

A bit of good old fashioned Balkan discipline courtesy of Serbian coach Ratomir Djukovic – known for his no-nonsense approach and tactical nous – whipped the talented but somewhat erratic Ghana into shape.

"At first they resisted," explained Djukovic at the time, "and came late to training, lunch, meetings, even the games, but I persisted, habits changed and now we are enjoying success."

In Germany, the Black Stars shone brighter than ever before. As the youngest team in the tournament, Ghana surprised many observers by making it through a tough group, which featured one of world football's heavyweights in the Czech Republic, and the eventual Jules Rimet trophy winners, Italy.

After a 2-0 loss to Italy in the opening group match, the Black Stars ramped up their efforts and stunned many with a brilliant comeback campaign. They stormed back to sink the Czech Republic 2-0, one of the pre-tournament favourites, before dispatching the United States 2-1. Like Australia, their run ended in the knock-out stage with a 3-0 loss to Brazil, but the Ghanaians had made their point. And like Australia, they'd garnered – no pun intended – increased respect in world football.

Cup comedown

Like Australia has the AFC Asian Cup, the Black Stars have the African Cup of Nations. In January and February this year, Ghana hosted the 2008 version and it was a feast for Ghana's passionate football supporters: the total tally of 99 goals eclipsed all previous tournaments.

In the Ghana camp, Djukovic having long since departed, French coach Claude LeRoy (who has recently left the job) took the reins of the Ghanaian side.

It all started well for the Black Stars, who were based in the capital Accra and enjoyed packed houses for all their games. The host nation topped its group with wins over Guinea (2-1) and Namibia (1-0) before finishing off with a 2-0 victory over Morocco. But it was the quarter-finals that really raised hopes.

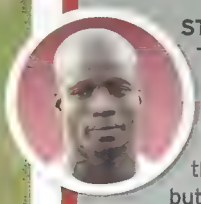
A 2-1 triumph over traditional force Nigeria – thanks to Michael Essien's goal in the shadows of halftime and a late strike from the talented Junior Agogo – propelled Ghana into the semi-finals.

However, the dream of winning their first Cup of Nations since 1982 was ended by Cameroon in a tense 1-0 loss. Stung by defeat, the side restored some pride with a 4-2 win over the Ivory Coast in the play-off for third.

To underline Ghana's place among Africa's elite, both Michael Essien and Sulley Muntari were named in the tournament's best XI while Richard Kingson, the Ghanaian keeper, was named on the bench. Only champions Egypt had more players selected.

STARS OF THE BLACK STARS

The current generation is a talented group



MICHAEL ESSIEN

Regarded as one of the best holding midfielders in the world, the Chelsea man [*right, top*] has had a top season at one of Europe's top clubs.

At just 25, he is set to rule the Black Stars' midfield until the 2014 FIFA World Cup. Sadly he will be missing tonight due to his appearance in this week's Champions League Final.

STEPHEN APPIAH

The midfield lynchpin at Fenerbahçe, the 27-year-old former Juve man [*left*] has been linked with moves to the English Premier League but for the moment still calls Turkey home.

At national team level, he proudly leads his country. In fact, against Australia 18 months ago he earned his 50th international cap.

The man whose nickname is Tornado has had a disappointing spell out through injury for much of the last six months and remains in doubt for tonight's match.

SULLEY ALI MUNTARI

A rare talent, Muntari has lit up the English Premier League with his goals and flair on the south coast at Portsmouth after signing from Italian Serie A club Udinese.

So far, 2008 has been a good year with the 23-year-old attacking midfielder being voted in the all-star side at the African Cup of Nations.

Muntari's international record of 38 games and 11 goals is clear proof of his ability as an attacking midfielder.

He was a starlet from an early age – at 16 Muntari was already in the Ghana Under-20 side. Many knew back then he'd be a force in the Black Stars.

ASAMOAH GYAN

Gyan [*right, middle*] goes down in football history as the first Ghanaian to score at the FIFA World Cup finals.

He also had the fastest goal of Germany 2006 – after just 68 seconds in the match against the Czech Republic. Although he was later sent off in the tournament, the world got to see another sublimely talented Ghanaian striker blossom on the big stage.

Gyan has been tagged a star ever since he scored on debut for Ghana as an 18-year-old in 2003 against Somalia. Now at 22, he's still very much the future of the Black Stars. The Udinese man is also the future at his Serie A club having signed a new contract last year for a further five years.

JUNIOR AGOGO

Aussie fans may remember it was Junior Agogo [*right, bottom*] who scored against Australia in 2006 in London in that friendly 1-1 draw. This was his first goal for the Black Stars.

The Nottingham Forest striker, 28, has been in England since the late-1990s but has improved over the course of his career.

He scored three of the side's 11 goals at the recent Africa Cup of Nations, the same number as Muntari. He's a late bloomer but Aussie fans will be impressed by Agogo's quality.

AUSTRALIAN

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EURO 2008 MADNESS

SUNDAY JUNE 8
(FOLLOWING ON FROM IRAQ VS SOCCEROOS)
MIDNIGHT OPENING CEREMONY
2AM OPENING GAME
SWITZERLAND VS CZECH REPUBLIC
4.45AM PORTUGAL VS TURKEY

SATURDAY JUNE 14
2AM ITALY VS ROMANIA
4.45AM NETHERLANDS VS FRANCE

SUNDAY JUNE 15
(FOLLOWING ON FROM QATAR VS SOCCEROOS)
2AM SWEDEN VS SPAIN
4.45AM GREECE VS RUSSIA

WEDNESDAY JUNE 18
4.45AM FRANCE VS ITALY

THURSDAY JUNE 19
4.45AM GREECE VS SPAIN

FRIDAY JUNE 20
4.45AM QUARTER FINAL 1

SATURDAY JUNE 21
4.45AM QUARTER-FINAL 2

SUNDAY JUNE 22
4.45AM QUARTER-FINAL 3

MONDAY JUNE 23
4.45AM QUARTER FINAL 4

THURSDAY JUNE 26
4.45AM SEMI-FINAL 1

FRIDAY JUNE 27
4.45AM SEMI-FINAL 2

MONDAY JUNE 30
4.45AM FINAL

SOCCEROOS WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

SUNDAY JUNE 1
SOCCEROOS VS IRAQ
ALL THE ACTION LIVE FROM SUNCORP
KICK-OFF 5PM

SATURDAY JUNE 7
IRAQ VS SOCCEROOS
ALL THE ACTION LIVE FROM DUBAI
KICK-OFF 8PM

SATURDAY JUNE 14
QATAR VS SOCCEROOS
ALL THE ACTION LIVE FROM DOHA
KICK-OFF 7PM

SUNDAY JUNE 22
SOCCEROOS VS CHINA
ALL THE ACTION LIVE FROM ANZ STADIUM ON THE BIG SCREEN
KICK-OFF 6PM

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In fact, this is the second meeting of the two countries in just 18 months, after Australia and Ghana finished 1-1 at Loftus Road in London in November 2006.

And our Matildas – who play against Canada in tonight's curtain-raiser – racked up their first-ever win at a FIFA Women's World Cup finals last year against Ghana.

Ghana's rise

Ghana are currently ranked 14 in the world, and stand proudly as the highest ranked African nation. Incredibly though, as recently as 2004, the senior Ghanaian side was ranked as low as 89. The leap up the rankings says much about the current generation's quality.

That quality has its roots in Ghana's success at youth level, particularly in the 1990s. Ghana's "Black Starlets" qualified for a staggering four FIFA Under 17 World Cup finals in the '90s, winning in 1991 and 1995 and being runners-up in 1993 and 1997. Last year, Ghana again reached the final of the FIFA Under 17 World Cup, while also making the final of the 2001 FIFA Under 20 World Cup.

The current generation – that of the immensely talented Essien, Muntari and Appiah – now knows what it takes to reach a FIFA World Cup. That is an achievement that was beyond legends Abedi Pele, Nii Lamptey and Tony Yeboah, who inspired the players you see tonight.

Now they've had the taste of the FIFA World Cup finals you can be sure that these modern players will do everything in their power to reach the first finals host by Africa, in 2010. With the side playing four key qualifiers over the next month and under a new coach, this is Ghana's last chance to prepare. Expect the Black Stars to shine brightly tonight.

With Ghana playing four key qualifiers over the next month, this is their last chance to prepare

Aussie adventures

To better understand the close relationship between Ghana and Australia, it's helpful to go way back in time, to 1993. Some 15 years ago, one of the most enjoyable and beautiful football matches was played in this country.

The FIFA World Youth Championships final was contested, fittingly, on the same ground as tonight's fixture. Ghana faced off against the might of Brazil.

In front of more than 40,000 fans, the sides produced a memorable match, full of trickery and flair, poise and power. Brazil reigned supreme 2-1 but Ghana left with a host of admirers.

The admiration flowed the other way too. One player from that Ghana side – defender Ransford Bannini – liked Australia so much, he stayed and played for a time in the old national league.

This tournament was the first link in a growing affinity between Australia and Ghana. At senior level, the two sides have been regular opponents in the last decade or so, this being the sixth time the Qantas Socceroos have locked horns with the Black Stars since 1995.

THE GREATS

Leeds United fans still talk about the mesmeric Tony Yeboah [*right*], one of the greatest ever Ghanaian players.

The powerful striker played at Elland Road during the 1990s but is best known for one of the greatest goals ever scored in the English Premier League – an audacious flick up and volley from 30 metres out against Wimbledon.

But you can't mention the greats of Ghana without pointing to Abedi Pele [*left*], a midfield king who lead his country with much distinction for many years.

Add to this list Nii Lamptey – the former youth star who was variously described in the early '90s as the next Pelé, but who never quite delivered in his senior years.

The now 34-year-old plays for Jomo Cosmos in South Africa but is still revered back home.

AUSTRALIA

GK Ante Covic
GK Adam Federici
GK Michael Petkovic
GK Mark Schwarzer
DF Michael Beauchamp
DF Adam Griffiths
DF Jade North
DF Matthew Spiranovic
DF Nikolai Topor-Stanley
DF Rodrigo Vargas

MF Leigh Broxham
MF Jacob Burns
MF David Carney
MF Jason Culina
MF James Holland
MF Mile Jedinak
MF Mile Sterjovski
MF Carl Valeri
FW Daniel Allsopp
FW Mark Bridge
FW Joel Griffiths
FW Harry Kewell
FW James Troisi

GHANA

Sammy Adjei GK
Fatau Dauda GK
Richard Kingson GK
Eric Addo DF
Harrison Afful DF
Nana Asare DF
John Mensah DF
John Paintsil DF
Richard Manu DF
Hans Sarpei DF
Illiasu Shilla DF

Andre Ayew MF
Anthony Annan MF
Ahmed Barusso MF
Prince Buaben MF
Haminu Dramani MF
Laryea Kingston MF
Bennard Kumordzi MF
Sulley Muntari MF
Junior Agogo FW
Matthew Amoah FW
Kwadwo Asamoah FW
Eric Bekoe FW
Asamoah Gyan FW
Baffour Gyan FW
Quincy Owusu-Abeyie FW

Squad lists correct at time of publication

Meet the Socceroos

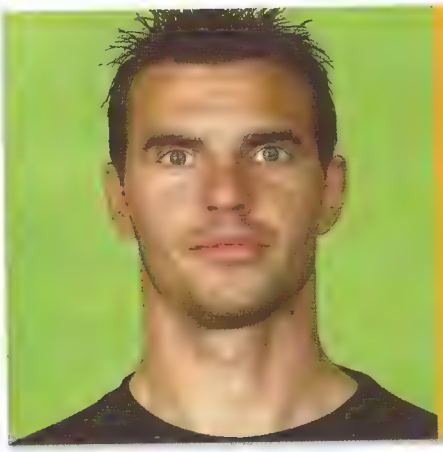
AUSTRALIA

These are your Qantas Socceroos set to take on the might of Ghana tonight

OFFICIALS
Vs. Ghana: Referee Hajime Matsuo (Japan) **Assistant Referee 1** Nathan Gibson **Assistant Referee 2** Matthew Cream **Fourth Official** Matthew Breeze **Inspector** Richard Lorenc (AFC appointment) **Commissioner** Ahmed Shahir (Maldives) **Vs. Canada: Referee** Tammy Ogston **AR1** Sarah Ho **AR2** Allyson Flynn **FO** Sara Hodson

STAFF
Technical Director Robert Baan **Head Coach** Pim Verbeek **Assistant Coach** Henk Duut **Goalkeeping Coach** Tony Franken **Team Manager** Gary Moretti **Medical Services** Jeff Steinweg **Physio** Phil Coles **Conditioning** Darren Burgess **Gear Steward** Dominic Rabsch **Head of Corporate and Public Affairs** Bonita Mersiades **Media Manager** Stuart Hodge

GOALKEEPERS



Ante Covic

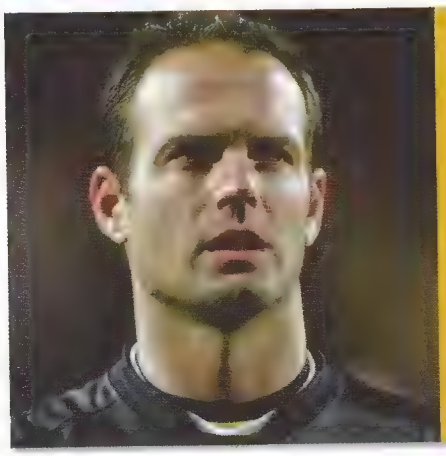
AGE: 32
POSITION: GOALKEEPER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS
APPEARANCES: 2

Ante made his Qantas Socceroos debut Bahrain in February, 2006 with Australia winning 3-1 and also played earlier this year against Singapore. The big keeper was fortunate enough to be third choice at the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany. A starring role for the Championship-winning Jets in the Hyundai A-League has pushed him back into contention for the number one jersey.

Adam Federici

AGE: 23
POSITION: GOALKEEPER
CLUB: READING (ENGLAND)
APPEARANCES: 0

Federici is currently on the books at English Premier League side Reading where he remains second choice, despite some promising performances for the first team in the League and FA Cups. The Nowra-native is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Sport and has already represented Australia at youth level. Regarded as a fine all-round keeper with excellent footwork.

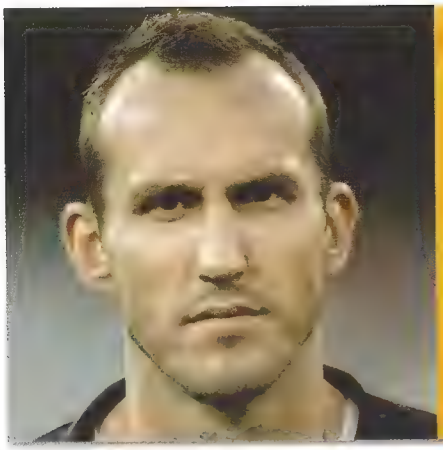


Michael Petkovic

AGE: 31
POSITION: GOALKEEPER
CLUB: SIVASSPOR (TURKEY)
APPEARANCES: 5

After more than 150 appearances with former national league side South Melbourne, Petkovic moved to Turkey in 2002. This season his club finished equal second in the league and qualified for the UEFA Intertoto Cup. They were officially fourth based on head-to-head results. Nonetheless, only Champions Galatasaray conceded fewer goals than Petkovic's side.

GOALKEEPERS

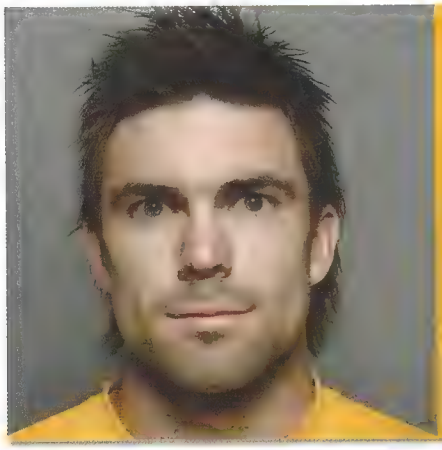


Mark Schwarzer

AGE: 35
POSITION: GOALKEEPER
CLUB: MIDDLESBROUGH (ENGLAND)
APPEARANCES: 54

Mark's place in Australian footballing history is set thanks to his FIFA World Cup qualifying heroics against Uruguay in 2005. He began his Qantas Socceroos career in similar fashion by starring in a shoot-out victory over Canada during a 1993 FIFA World Cup qualifier in his first senior start. A star in the English Premiership with Middlesbrough, Mark is one of our best-loved stars.

DEFENDERS



Michael Beauchamp

AGE: 27
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: FC NURNBERG (GERMANY)
APPEARANCES: 13

Michael made his national team debut away to Bahrain in February 2006 in an AFC Asian Cup group qualifier. Since moving to Germany in 2006, he has been a fringe player for Nurnberg but has played more than a dozen games for them this season including three in the UEFA Cup. Playing the whole game, he was a vital performer in holding out China in the 0-0 draw back in March.

Adam Griffiths

AGE: 28
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS
APPEARANCES: 1

After returning last season to Australia and the Hyundai A-League, Adam's form and versatility for high-flying Newcastle has attracted many admirers. Not only can he play in the centre of defence or as a full-back, but the tall, aggressive powerhouse has also played in midfield. He even popped up to score a few goals for the Jets on their way to the Hyundai A-League Championship.

Jade North

AGE: 26
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS
APPEARANCES: 17

A mobile and versatile defender, North fits the bill for the modern Qantas Socceroo perfectly. The Newcastle Jets defender has been recognised at national level, having played for our national U17, U20 and U23 sides as well as the senior side over the last eight years. He starred in April's draw with China, keeping the home side's powerful strikers scoreless.

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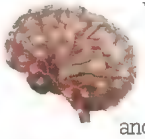

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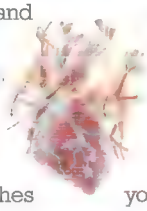

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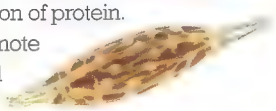

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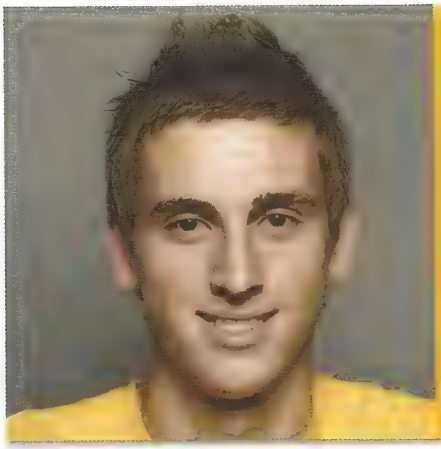
DEFENDERS



Matthew Spiranovic

AGE: 19
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: FC NURNBERG (GERMANY)
APPEARANCES: 0

Another Australian currently plying his trade at German Bundesliga side Nurnberg, Spiranovic was last year the subject of speculation after Croatian officials contacted to him in a bid to get the highly-rated defender to play for their national team. Spiranovic has already represented Australia at youth level and has committed his future to the green and gold.

Nikolai Topor-Stanley

AGE: 22
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: PERTH GLORY
APPEARANCES: 1

Another of Graham Arnold's star Qantas U23s who have come of age over the last two seasons as the side qualified through the AFC for the first time. Nikolai made his name in the Hyundai A-League with Sydney FC before transferring to Perth Glory last season. With a dearth of naturally left-sided players in the national setup, Nikolai is worth his weight in gold.

Rodrigo Vargas

AGE: 29
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY
APPEARANCES: 0

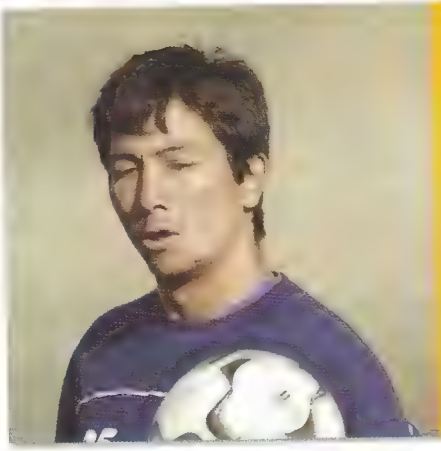
It's been an incredible two years for Melburnian Rodrigo Vargas. The classy defender only made his debut for Hyundai A-League side Melbourne Victory in 2006, after starring in Victoria's premier league. Since then he has won a Hyundai A-League Championship, has played in the AFC Champions League and has forced his way into Qantas Socceroos reckoning.

MIDFIELDERS

Leigh Broxham

AGE: 20
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY
APPEARANCES: 1

Leigh made his Qantas Socceroos debut coming off the bench in March's friendly against Singapore. He has become a lynchpin of the Victory midfield with his bustling style and assured ball playing. His determination and toughness make up for what Broxham lacks in height, and have ensured his passage from the Under 17 team at the 2004 World Cup to the full Qantas Socceroos side.



Jacob Burns

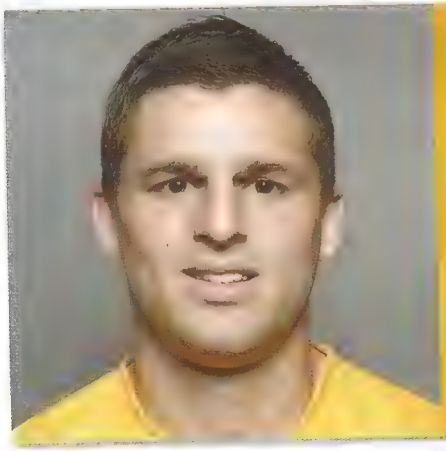
AGE: 30
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: WISLA KRAKOW (POLAND)
APPEARANCES: 5

Hard-working Jacob debuted for the Qantas Socceroos in Scotland when the Aussies shocked the Scots 2-0 in a friendly eight years ago. He also played in the UEFA Champions League for Leeds before his career stalled in England's lower leagues. His move to Polish side Wisla Krakow rejuvenated him however and he is now on the fringes of the national team.

David Carney

AGE 24
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: SHEFFIELD UNITED (ENGLAND)
APPEARANCES: 8

David is an excitement machine. He caught the eye with some outstanding performances at the 2007 AFC Asian Cup finals, playing in the unfamiliar role of left wing-back. It earned him a contract with ambitious English club Sheffield United after he'd made his name at Sydney FC. Carney scored a brilliant goal for the national team against Nigeria last November.



Jason Culina

AGE: 27
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: PSV EINDHOVEN (HOLLAND)
APPEARANCES: 29

Jason's mobility, link play and ability to play the ball out of midfield intelligently will be vital on the journey to South Africa for the Qantas Socceroos. He is now considered to be one of the national team's most important players for his consistency and versatility. For PSV this season he played in both the UEFA European Champions League and the UEFA Cup.

James Holland

AGE: 19
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS
APPEARANCES: 1

James's rise to Qantas Socceroo selection has been nothing short of meteoric. At just 18, James broke into the Hyundai A-League with Newcastle Jets during last season. However, the attacking midfielder's running, precision passing, deft free kicks and ability to score caught the eye of Pim Verbeek who gave him his debut in March in the friendly against Singapore.

MIDFIELDERS

Mile Jedinak

AGE: 23
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: CENTRAL COAST MARINERS
APPEARANCES: 1

Only a couple of years ago Mile was playing in the New South Wales state league. But after two outstanding seasons with Central Coast in the Hyundai A-League, he has forced his powerful frame into Qantas Socceroos reckoning. A bruiser in midfield, Jedinak will dominate his opponent no matter what it takes and also possess a powerful strike.

Mile Sterjovski

AGE: 28
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: DERBY COUNTY (ENGLAND)
APPEARANCES: 33

Mile is another talented product of the Wollongong football scene. He first got noticed in the late 90s with He moved to Europe in 2000 – first with Lille in France then Switzerland's Basel where he has made his name as an attacking wide midfielder. In January he moved to Derby in England where his class and determination impressed the local fans despite his side's poor run of results.

Carl Valeri

AGE: 23
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: GROSSETO (ITALY)
APPEARANCES: 6

The defensive midfielder has represented Australia at all levels and made his debut for the Qantas Socceroos in March 2007 against China. Carl has played all his professional football in Italy, after he was signed by Inter Milan, who have loaned him out to smaller clubs to gain experience. He is expected to be a regular Qantas Socceroo for years to come.

FORWARDS

Daniel Allsopp

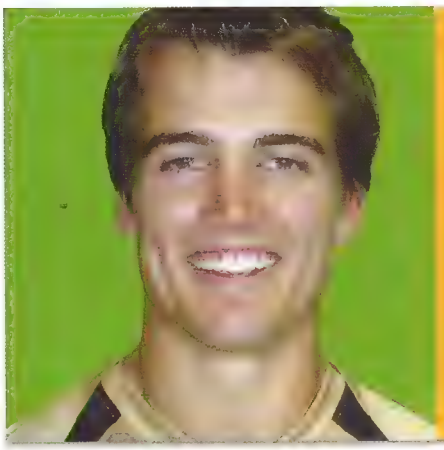
AGE: 29
POSITION: FORWARD
CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY
APPEARANCES: 1

This powerful, hard running striker played a major role in Melbourne Victory's blitz of the Hyundai A-League Championship two seasons ago when his consistent strike rate won him the Golden Boot award. Before that Danny represented Australia at U17 level and went on to appear for the Young Socceroos and the Under 23s and played in England for seven years.

Mark Bridge

AGE: 22
POSITION: FORWARD
CLUB: SYDNEY FC
APPEARANCES: 1

Mark's goal-scoring contribution to Newcastle Jets' Hyundai A-League triumph last season was vital in taking the scoring load off goal-machine Joel Griffiths. At international level, Mark has been an important contributor to the Qantas U23s' successful campaign for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. At 22, Bridge is part of the new generation of Aussie football stars.



Joel Griffiths

AGE: 28
POSITION: FORWARD
CLUB: AVISPA FUKUOKA (JAPAN)
APPEARANCES: 2

Last Hyundai A-League season was all Joel's after a stunning display of form from the striker currently on loan in Japan. He was the highest individual goalscorer ever in one season of the Hyundai A-League, and his goals led his team to the Championship. Joel scored on debut for the Qantas Socceroos in 2005 against Jamaica, marking the occasion with a Skippy-style celebration.

Harry Kewell

AGE: 29
POSITION: FORWARD
CLUB: LIVERPOOL
APPEARANCES: 30

Recently voted one of the top five Australian footballers of all time by *FourFourTwo* magazine, Kewell is an Aussie sports superstar. His performances at the 2006 FIFA World Cup were memorable as was his goal over a decade ago in a FIFA World Cup qualifier against Iran. Despite suffering a series of injuries over the last two years, he's still a huge danger for any team.

James Troisi

AGE: 19
POSITION: FORWARD
CLUB: NONE PRESENTLY
APPEARANCES: 1

James has been on the fringes of the big-time for a couple of years now. The talented attacking midfielder plays a lot like Harry Kewell – he can take players on, get in a good cross and can score. Having recently been released by Newcastle in the English Premier League, Troisi is keen to prove his worth to get his career back on track, and this match provides the perfect opportunity.

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TEN YEARS FROM NOW...

We asked some of the game's brightest thinkers to tell us where Australian football will be in 2018

By Aidan Ormond

Every Australian football fan looks forward to the day when Australia hosts the FIFA World Cup. Whether it's 2018 or a time further in the future, when the Qantas Socceroos step out in front of 100,000 Sydneysiders for the opening match of the tournament, Australia will join world sport's ultimate club. If 2018 does draw the world's spotlight onto us, what will the world see? What will Australian football be like in a decade?

From the top

Ron Smith was AIS head football coach for four years in the 1980s, and has held club managerial positions in Malaysia and the Hyundai A-League. The English-born Aussie has also had technical roles with the Malaysian FA and Football Federation Australia – currently he's assistant to Qantas Under 23s coach Graham Arnold and an FFA technical analyst. Smith feels our footballers' individual abilities are at the heart of the football's standard in Australia.

"Coaches want technical attributes. Can we develop good players with awareness, touch, good technical skills who can dribble and pass well?" he asks.

"These are the things that will help us qualify for FIFA World Cups. And in the Asian Football Confederation [AFC], it's only going to get more difficult."

Smith reckons the success of the national team in the future is dependant

100,000 Aussies watching the 2018 FIFA World Cup opener?

on two factors – player production and the game's infrastructure. If we can get them right, our football – and indeed our Qantas Socceroos – will be stronger for it by 2018.

"Can we produce players good enough to get contracts with big clubs?" he wonders. "You see, many big Euro clubs are now putting money into developing their own players, so we need to be even better than before.

"We must keep making the Hyundai A-League better and more rewarding so these players stay for a bit longer. The key is building a great foundation at club level. You need a good strong infrastructure for sustained growth.

"And related to that, we need access

SOCCEROO-GAZING: 2018 SPECULATION

Will we see an Aussie-raised coach, such as a Gary van Egmond or a Tony Popovic, at the helm of the Qantas Socceroos in 2018?

"I'd like to think so," says Ron Smith. "Don't ever discount it as the Hyundai A-League and infrastructure develops."

As for the players, here's a speculative squad of players that could be pulling on the Green and Gold in 10 years' time.

You will recognise the veterans as our current Qantas Under 23s generation. The younger players are boys just now beginning to make a name for themselves, but will be familiar to eagle-eyed fans.

(Age in brackets in 2018)

Keepers Mitchell Langerak (30) **Tando Velaphi** (31) **Danny Vukovic** (33)

Defenders **Terry Antonis** (24) **Nigel Boogaard** (32) **Fabio DiLizia** (27) **Adrian Leijer** (32) **Mark Milligan** (32) **Seb Ryall** (29) **Matthew Spiranovic** (30)

Midfielders **Kearyn Baccus** (25) **Oliver Bozanic** (29) **Kamal Ibrahim** (26) **Ben Kantarovski** (26) **Steve Hagicostas** (26) **James Holland** (29) **Tommy Oar** (26) **Teddy Yabio** (27)

Forwards **Nathan Burns** (30) **Bruce Djite** (31) **Panos Armenakas** (20) **Matthew Fletcher** (25) **Corey Gameiro** (25) **Robbie Kruse** (29) **Michael Zullo** (29)

Melbourne Victory's new stadium currently under construction

to stadia that will allow the game to develop. It gives you stability."

In Japan's J.League, for instance, they have minimum requirements for their clubs' training facilities and infrastructure. A good example is Urawa Red Diamonds, a club Sydney FC got to see up close in last year's AFC Champions League, and a club that enjoys almost exclusive access to its own elite training and matchday facilities.

"It's what we should be aiming for," Smith says of the comparison to Urawa. "Some Hyundai A-League clubs are battling with training facilities, which impacts on them and their performance.

"Other AFC countries aren't standing still," he adds. "You can play catch up for a while but we have a long way to go with club structures and infrastructures. Inside 10 years there may be stadia built specifically for Hyundai A-League football to take place.

"As our game progresses and expands, we're going to need to have venues that we can guarantee will be available over a nine month period and with a good surface."

"Other AFC countries aren't standing still... we have a long way to go with infrastructure"

Ian Greener, the head men's soccer coach at the Victorian Institute of Sport, takes up the point from a grass roots perspective.

"As the game grows, facilities will be a challenge. In recent years we have had the water shortage problems in Victoria which have had an adverse effect on playing surfaces."

"Partnerships with local councils, clubs, associations, community schools must lead to the building and maintaining of synthetic surfaces which can be used by all members of the local community and provide us with areas to allow kids to play, develop and learn under the best conditions possible."

Act big think small

To boost our junior players' general skill level, the FFA's 2007 National Football Development Plan (NFDP), introduced small-sided games (SSG) for junior players.

Greener sees SSG as vital, but also offers caution.

"At this age group no coaching is better than bad coaching and we must at the same time maintain focus on the coach education program to support the junior coaches and to ensure children receive the appropriate information.

"It will take time for the results to show from the SSG, but I am sure in 10 years time we will clearly see the rewards, although I am still apprehensive regarding the behaviour of the adults to ensure they just let the kids play."

In the Sunshine State, Mike Mulvey, the head football coach at the Queensland Academy of Sport, agrees that SSG is long overdue and will also help players defensively.

"It has pained me for many years to watch junior football played on a big field with players having a limited number of touches and parents on the sidelines ranting and raving.

"It will take time to convince parents that small-sided games are the best way forward but I believe with the strong leadership through the state and national governing bodies we will see a marked improvement in players' technique and skill levels."

"In SSG there are lots of opportunities for players to practise their skills one versus one in an attacking sense but also to improve their defending techniques in one versus one situations."

Another strand of the NFDP is a national youth league [NYL], kicking off in spring this year. The NYL will run in conjunction with the Hyundai A-League.

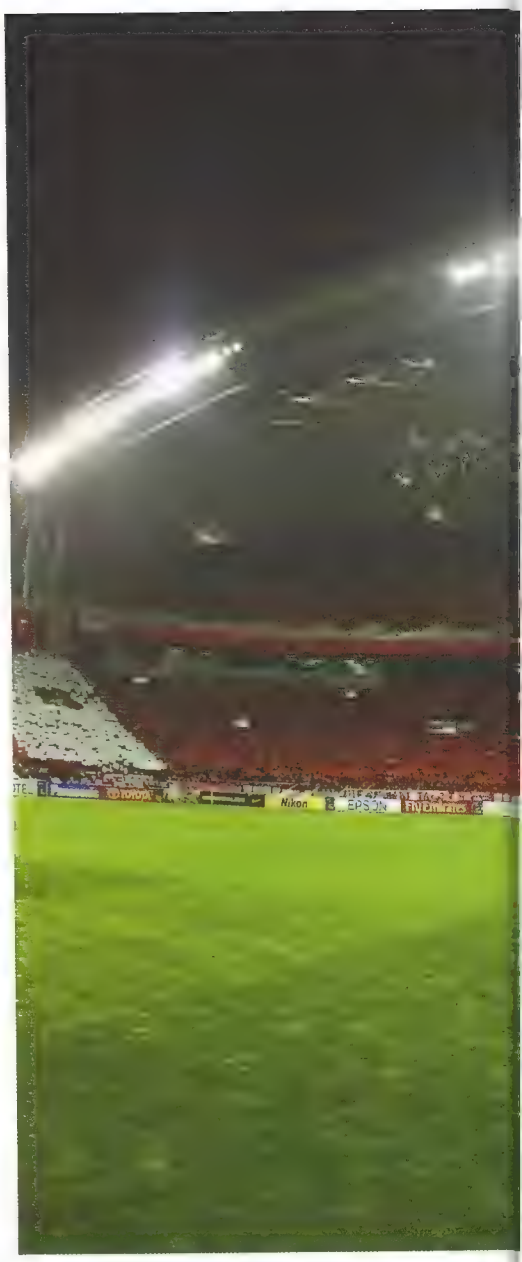
"There is no doubt the league will go through some teething problems and face challenges in the early years," predicts Greener, "but over the next decade I am confident we will see the playing standards grow.

"Players will develop and stay longer here in Australia before heading overseas, interest in the league will increase and also coaching and support staff will emerge who will raise the overall coaching standards.

"It will be up to the national youth league coaches to ensure the winning mentality is linked very much to the process not just the outcome."

Impending boom

Away from the field and Murray Shaw – boss of Fox Sports Football on Foxtel subscription TV – foreshadows a day when a TV broadcasting deal will drop a massive payload of money into football in Australia.



The future of matchdays? Melbourne's new stadium

The J.League's Urawa Reds set the example for Aussie infrastructure

EVOLVING FACE OF THE SOCCEROOS

Million Butshiire, Kamal Ibrahim, Teddy Yabio, Danai Gapare: four talented young Aussie footballers involved with the Qantas Joeys this year. Nothing strange about that, except all four hail from Africa – Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan and Zimbabwe respectively.

These players' arrival on the Aussie scene opens an intriguing window into the potential future of the Qantas Socceroos in 10 years time.

So perhaps it's fitting that on the day that Ghana play the Qantas Socceroos in Sydney, we're speculating on Africa's influence on the game's future...

"Certainly based on recent trends we have quality young African players in our system now and see no reason why that trend should not continue," says Ron Smith. "Such players can bring something to our game."

As for those of Asian heritage impacting on our football culture, Smith's experience in Asia tells him this may take some time.

"There is a pervading mentality in many Asian cultures that education is more important and football is secondary. So this may feed into the local culture of kids whose parents were born in Asia.

"However, their kids could be the generation that could start to play more football, especially if by then the Hyundai A-League is a more viable occupation."

And there is also our indigenous sportspeople. We're only now seeing the likes of Jade North, David Williams and Travis Dodd breakthrough into the national teams.

The FFA wishes to encourage more indigenous talent in the future.

Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission

WINNING PARTNERSHIP

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The Australian Sports Commission is the Australian Government agency that develops, supports and invests in sport at all levels in Australia. Football Federation Australia has worked closely with the Australian Sports Commission to develop football from community participation to high-level performance.

Football Federation Australia is one of many national sporting organisations that has formed a winning partnership with the Australian Sports Commission to develop its sport in Australia.

AUSTRALIAN SPORTS COMMISSION

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Small-sided games emphasise one-on-one skills

"The Japan game at the AFC Asian Cup was the most watched show on subscription TV. Ever"

This financial windfall will find its way into strengthening national program and club structures, just as TV deals in Europe and elsewhere around the world have done.

The current broadcasting deal with Fox Sports and FFA expires in 2012, six years prior to the FIFA World Cup in 2018. Shaw predicts a new, lucrative deal involving both subscription TV and free-to-air together could materialise.

"TV rights are crucial. I think if you look at other sports as the model, then you'd say, yes, there could be a split between subscription TV and free-to-air. It remains to be seen but it's an extreme possibility," says Shaw.

Australian clubs will also benefit from the attraction for broadcasters of continental competitions. The AFC Champions League threatens to become a behemoth as it matures and finds appeal in the region's biggest markets of Japan and China.

"It could be enormous," says Shaw. "It will grow, particularly after the changes to the competition in 2009. I can also see an expansion of the Pan Pacific tournament with Australian teams getting involved like they did this year."

Shaw cautions against too much hype, though: "We can't get ahead of ourselves. The first three years of the Hyundai A-League have seen amazing increases across the board. It'll stop at some stage and there'll be a lull period. We can't expect it to continue at the same rate.

"Twenty thousand average crowds are realistic, obviously depending on success of teams on the field. But continued success for the Socceroos is vital."

"The Qantas Socceroos are an enormous beast right now," he adds. "In fact their game against Japan last year at the AFC Asian Cup was the most watched show on subscription TV. Of any kind. Ever.

"Who knows what'll happen if we get Japan for a FIFA World Cup qualifier."

Crystal football

"Rather than what I think... what I hope in 10 years will be an A-League with at least 16 teams, crowds in the region of 50-60,000 for blockbusters and around 20,000 average, and an FA Cup-style of competition across all states to bring the league that bit of romance and history our game needs," says Greener.

Can anyone really foresee the future though? After all, if you'd asked *The Socceroo* to peer into its crystal ball in 1998, we couldn't have predicted the supersonic rise of football in Australia.

To recap in case you missed it: the code finally enjoyed FIFA World Cup success for the Qantas Socceroos and Matildas; the Hyundai A-League arrived and grew at a surprising pace in virtually every aspect; we've seen increased media backing via historic broadcasting deals and partnerships; and, similarly, firmer financial footing for the FFA.

Supporting this renaissance has been a sustained boom in numbers at grass roots level for juniors and seniors – girls and boys – while at the very top of the pyramid, the FFA made the historic and fundamental decision to leave Oceania and move into the Asian Football Confederation.

And we have our heroes who have become household names, like Qantas Socceroos Lucas Neill, Tim Cahill, Mark Viduka, Mark Schwarzer and Mark Bresciano – many of whom play in the biggest leagues across Europe.

It's been quite a ride over the last 10 years... we now need to build on that in the next 10. "We mustn't get complacent," cautions Smith. "The qualification is going to be just as difficult, even more difficult as time goes on. Asia is only going to get stronger."

Though challenges to football persist, the next decade promises much. Jump on board the football bus headed for 2018 – it's going to be a fun ride.

QLD WOMEN ON THE UP

"We have seen a massive growth in the women's game following on from the Matildas' performances in the AFC Asian Cup and FIFA World Cup," says QAS's Mike Mulvey.

"Parents are falling in love with the game because they see a clear pathway for their kids to play for Australia."

"When I started the QAS program back in 1999 there was not much depth. Now we have lots of players in national teams with more in the pipeline."

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LOCAL BOY

ST CLAIR MAKES ITS MARK

Mark Bridge spent his youth in Sydney's west... at Danny Vukovic's house

The iconic image of the Newcastle Jets' run to the Hyundai A-League Championship last year was of then-Jets player Mark Bridge guiding the winning goal in the 2008 Hyundai A-League Grand Final past Central Coast Mariners keeper Danny Vukovic. For residents of St Clair, a suburb of western Sydney just east of Penrith, Bridge versus Vukovic was a familiar sight.

Growing up in St Clair, Mark Bridge lived a few hundred metres from Danny Vukovic. After school and on weekends, Vukovic used to invite Bridge over to his house because the Bridge residence was at the top of the hill, and it was easier for Mark to walk down the hill than it was for Danny to walk up it. Bridge would wander down and enjoy a game of headers in the Vukovic family pool.

The two were not only near neighbours, they both attended Westfields Sports High School in Fairfield – a 25-minute drive every morning from St Clair.

"I didn't have a problem with the travel, but Mum probably wasn't happy about the early mornings," Bridge says. "It was harder for my mum and dad because we had training in year 7 and 8 at 7:30 in the morning twice a week. I'm glad my parents stuck it out though."

Making the Westfields cut was a major boost for Mark's career. The school's famous football program has produced the likes of Brett Emerton, Harry Kewell, Michael Beauchamp and Jason Culina.

"I can remember getting my letter at home telling me I had got in," Mark says. "Mum was happy. She was just happy that I didn't have to go to St Clair High School because I don't think that was one of the best schools around. She made me trial at Penrith Selective which was like a smart school. So she was trying to everything to stop me going to St Clair!"

The Bridge family moved to St Clair when Mark was eight from the suburb of Blackett, 20 minutes to the north near Mt Druitt. Football for Blackett juniors still provides the Sydney FC striker with fond memories. Bridge is quick to revisit his mighty 13-goal performance for the local under 6s. It was the start of a junior career that saw Bridge play for several sides across the heart of Sydney's west.

Alongside his Westfields football commitments, Bridge jumped around the junior representative ranks at Nepean and Granville, before settling down at Parramatta Melita for a few years in his early to mid-teens. There Bridge played for the under 19s side at the age of 15 and momentum started to build towards a future in professional football. When he finally made his senior league debut in 2003 in the old NSL on the well-trodden Parramatta Stadium turf, his promise was well-known. That afternoon stands out for Bridge in his football upbringing.

"I was on for 15 or 20 minutes. Even though it was only a small crowd – maybe 4000 or 5000 – I remember people cheering for me when I went onto the field. I hit one good long ball – I remember like it was yesterday by the way. I hit one good pass to [former Central Coast player Andre] Gumprecht across the field and I hit it sweet.

> "I hit one good long ball [on my debut] – I remember like it was yesterday by the way"

Fast forward five years to the 2008 Hyundai A-League Grand Final and one of St Clair's favourite sons was still hitting them sweet. Whether it's for the Qantas Socceroos, Qantas Under 23s or his new club Sydney FC, he looks set to do St Clair proud for some time to come.

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SHOOT 'N' SCORE!

AUSSIES AGAINST AFRICANS

1 Who is pictured left playing for the Matildas against Ghana?

2 What the score in the men's match against Ghana in South Africa in 1996?

3 Who was the captain, and who scored in that international?

4 In which year did Ghana tour Australia and play three friendly international matches?

5 Who played his final international match in the first of these matches?

6 Which three Aussie players started as captain in the three fixtures on that tour?

7 How many of the Aussies who played in the 1988 match against Nigeria are now Hyundai A-League coaches?

8 Who made his first start for the Qantas Socceroos against Nigeria last year?

9 Who replaced Harry Kewell in the 64th minute of the 2004 friendly victory over South Africa?

10 Which country beat Australia for bronze in the Barcelona Olympics?

11 What was the score?

12 In the same tournament, the sides played each other in their group matches. What was the score?

13 What was the score between Ghana and Australia in the 2007 FIFA Women's World Cup?

14 In the 2005 friendly draw with South Africa in Durban, who replaced Paul Agostino to make his last appearance (so far) for Australia?

15 How many Aussies played against Tunisia in both the 1997 friendly and the 2005 FIFA Confederations Cup?

BACK A DECADE

1 In 1998, which current Qantas Socceroo made his debut in a 1-0 friendly loss to Chile?

2 Which Qantas Socceroo made his international debut in the 3-1 victory over Fiji in the same year?

3 Which four current Hyundai A-League players also made their international debuts in 1998?

4 How many hat-tricks did Damian Mori score in September 1998?

5 Which player was named in both the Croatia and Australian squads for a June 1998 friendly?

6 Which former Qantas Socceroo is pictured right?

7 Who did Australia play in the final of the OFC Nations Cup in 1998 and what was the score?

8 At the time, how many goals off the record for the largest victory in an international was Australia's 16-0 win over Cook Islands?

9 How many players scored hat-tricks in that match?

10 Who became caretaker coach of the Qantas Socceroos after Terry Venables departed?

ANSWERS! **Aussies against Africans 1:** Sally Shipard **2:** 2-0 to Australia **3:** Captain Alex Tobin, goals: Damian Mori and Paul Trimboli **4:** 1995 **5:** Frank Farina **6:** Frank Farina, Alex Tobin, Paul Wade **7:** Three: Gary Van Egmond, John Kosmina and David Mitchell **8:** Nick Carle **9:** David Zdrilic **10:** Ghana **11:** 1-0 **12:** 3-1 to Ghana **13:** 4-1 to Australia **14:** Max Vieri **15:** Four: Tony Vidmar, Josip Skoko, Mark Viduka and John Aloisi **Back a Decade 1:** Brett Emerton **2:** Scott Chipperfield **3:** Hayden Foxe, Alvin Ceccoli, Nick Rizzo and Simon Colosimo **4:** Three (includes one four-goal haul) **5:** Ante Seric **6:** Paul Trimboli **7:** New Zealand, Australia lost 1-0 **8:** One, Iran had beaten Maldives 17-0 in 1997 **9:** Three: Damian Mori, Paul Trimboli and Kris Trajanovski (who scored four after coming on at halftime **10:** Raul Blanco

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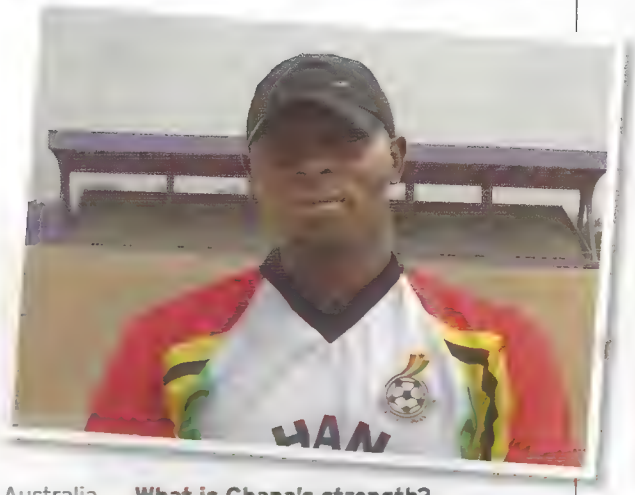
YAW ACHEAMPONG STAR SUPPORTER

Although he moved to Australia as a teenager more than a decade ago, Yaw Acheampong has never lost his love for Ghanaian football



AGE 32
OCCUPATION Lawyer
SUPPORTS Ghana

Have you seen Ghana play live before?
Yes. It was actually here in Sydney in 1995. They came out here for a three match tour against Australia.

Do you remember that series well?
It was 2-1 in the Sydney one, to Australia, 1-0 to Australia in the Adelaide, and I think 1-0 to Ghana in the Perth one. I remember that because that's the last time we actually beat Australia.

What did you think in April when the Ghana friendly was announced?
Actually, mixed reactions because I know they've got a FIFA World Cup qualifier to play in Ghana a week after this game with Australia. I was happy to get the opportunity to see them but at the same time I was concerned that they could be jetlagged or tired for the real game, which is the FIFA World Cup qualifier. But personally, of course I'm happy.

What have you done to prepare?
I'm the secretary of the Ghana Association so I have been put in charge of looking after tickets for the community so I've organised that with the FFA. We're trying to get group bookings for the Ghanaian community in the Ghana supporters end. We're also checking to see if we can organise some sort of reception for the team, possibly after the game. We're mindful that because they're pressed for time, we may not have that opportunity but we're just waiting to see what their itinerary and their accommodation plans will be.

What is your first memory of Ghana?
My earliest one would be 1982 when we won the African Cup. We haven't won it since. We played it in Libya. That was basically Abedi Pele's debut tournament and I was really young but I remember the way we celebrated.

What is Ghana's strength?
The strength is definitely in our midfield players. Essien is really versatile and strong. He gets good support from Muntari and Stephen Appiah, but I think Appiah's injured so he won't be here. They always get good support from midfield. They create many chances in a game. The weakness is in the attack, the strikers. We've never been able to replace the likes of Tony Yeboah. So while the midfield is really good, if they had played in teams with really good strikers they would have set up many goals. We have to rely on our midfielders to score for us.

Who's your favourite all-time player?
It would be have to be Abedi Pele [*left, shirtless*] for sure. Growing up, everyone aspired to be like him. With him on the park you always felt you had a chance, no matter which team you were playing. He could do wonders on the park.

And your favourite era?
I think from '92. They competed in the African Cup in 1992 in Senegal. They lost in the final but had a really good campaign. There were so many good players from then. Abedi Pele was involved, as was Yeboah.

What is your prediction for tonight?
I think it will be a draw, a 1-1 draw. Obviously Australia will be thinking of the FIFA World Cup qualifiers and Ghana will be doing the same. Ghana will be overwhelmed by the number of Ghanaians here and the support they will get, so they might push for a goal.

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EDITOR IN CHIEF Paul Hansford
PUBLISHER Andy Jackson
SALES MANAGER Mike Hemmingway
TO ADVERTISE CALL (02) 8908 2221
PRODUCTION MANAGER
Angela Sutherland
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NUMBER CRUNCH

All the numbers you need to know about Australia's opponent

233

GHANA'S INTERNATIONAL PHONE PREFIX

23,382,848

POPULATION OF GHANA

0

THE NUMBER OF TIMES GHANA HAD QUALIFIED FOR THE FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS PRIOR TO REACHING THE SECOND ROUND IN GERMANY IN 2006

1957

THE YEAR OF GHANA'S INDEPENDENCE FROM THE UK

INTERNATIONAL GOALS SCORED BY ABEDI PELE IN 73 APPEARANCES

33

14

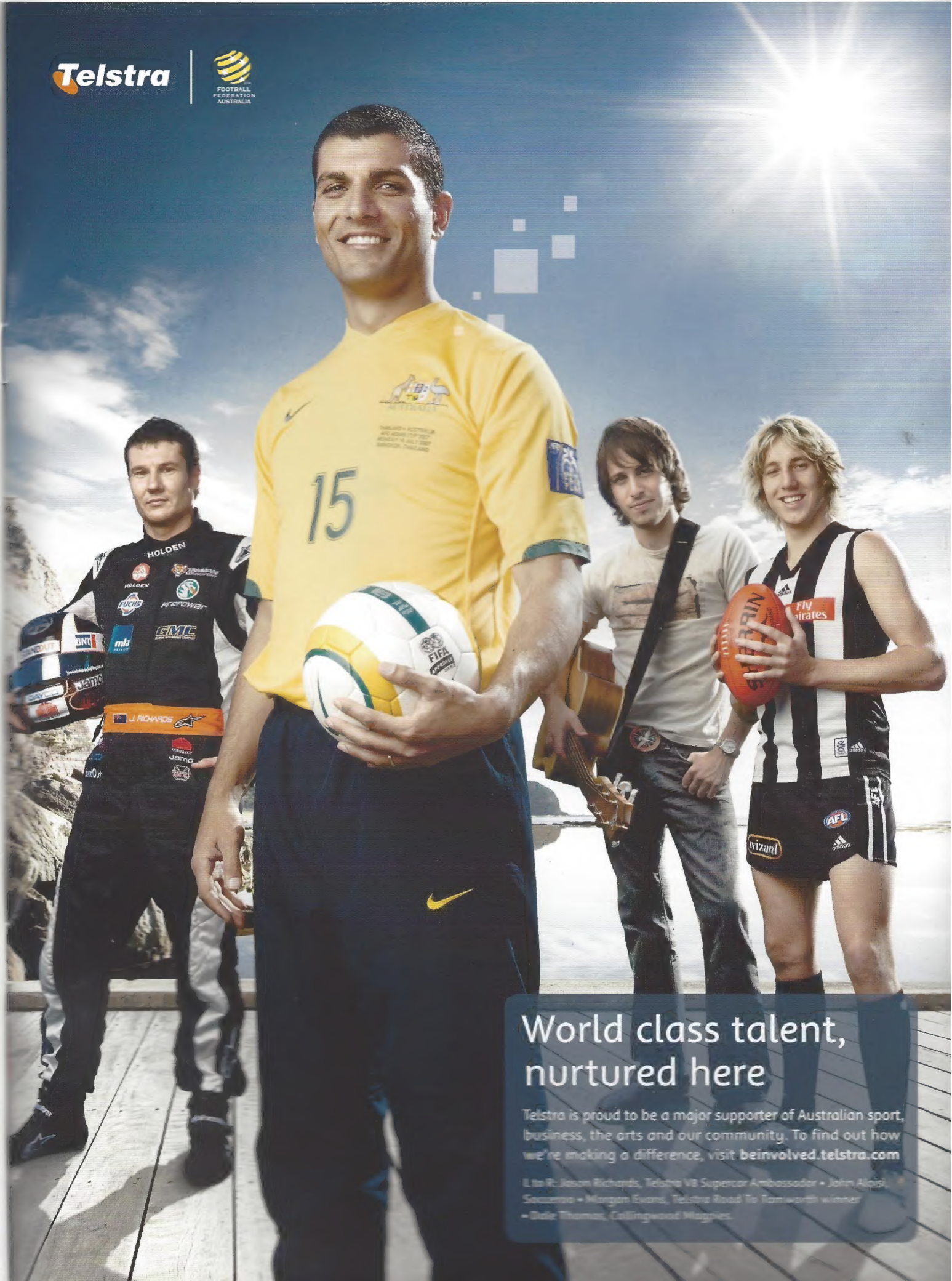
GHANA'S CURRENT FIFA WORLD RANKING

THE NUMBER OF PENALTIES TAKEN IN GHANA'S 11-10 SHOOT-OUT LOSS IN THE 1992 AFRICAN CUP OF NATIONS FINAL AGAINST IVORY COAST

24

736.6

GHANA'S ANNUAL AVERAGE RAINFALL IN MILLIMETRES - AROUND HALF THIS FIGURE FALLS IN MAY AND JUNE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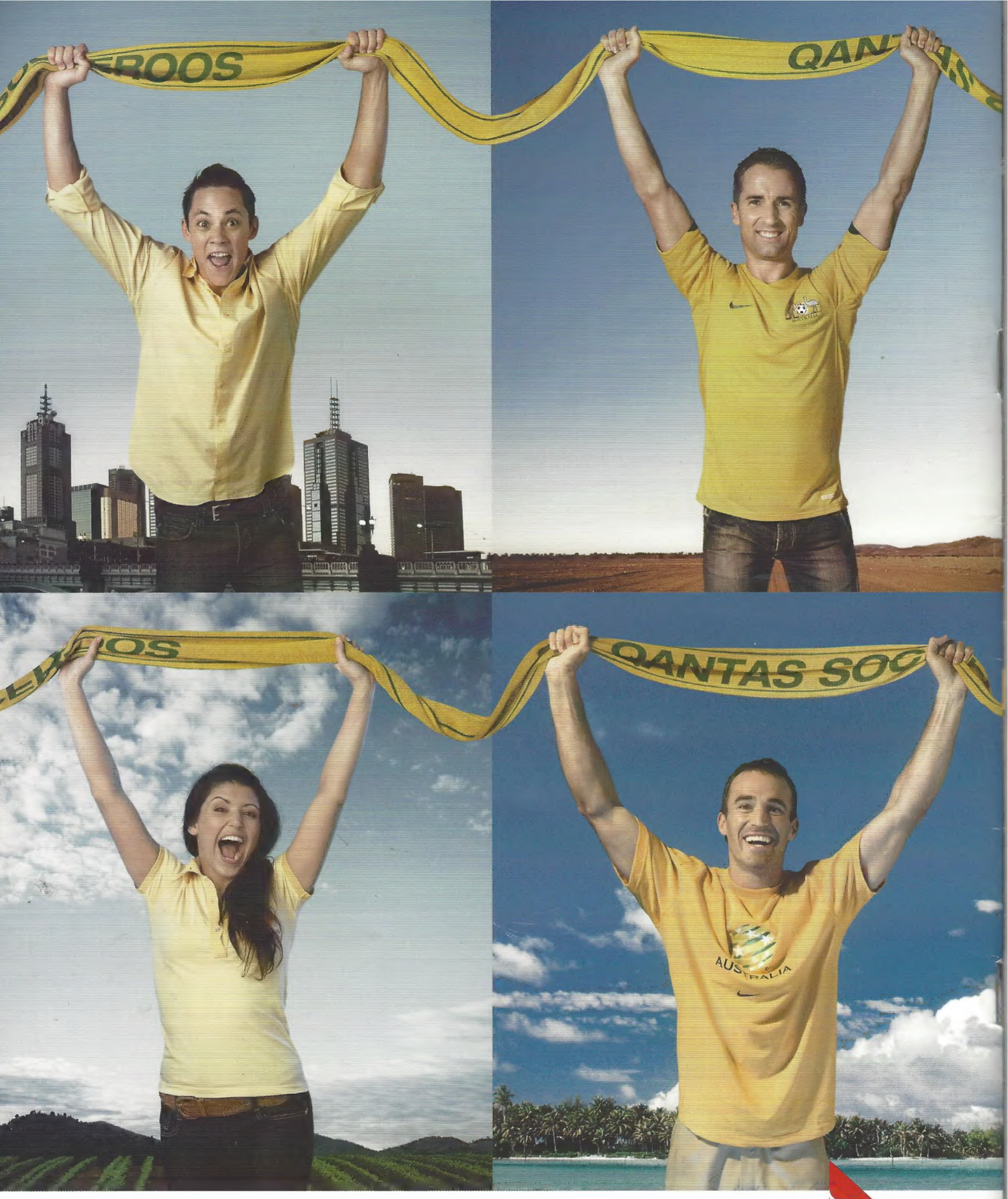

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